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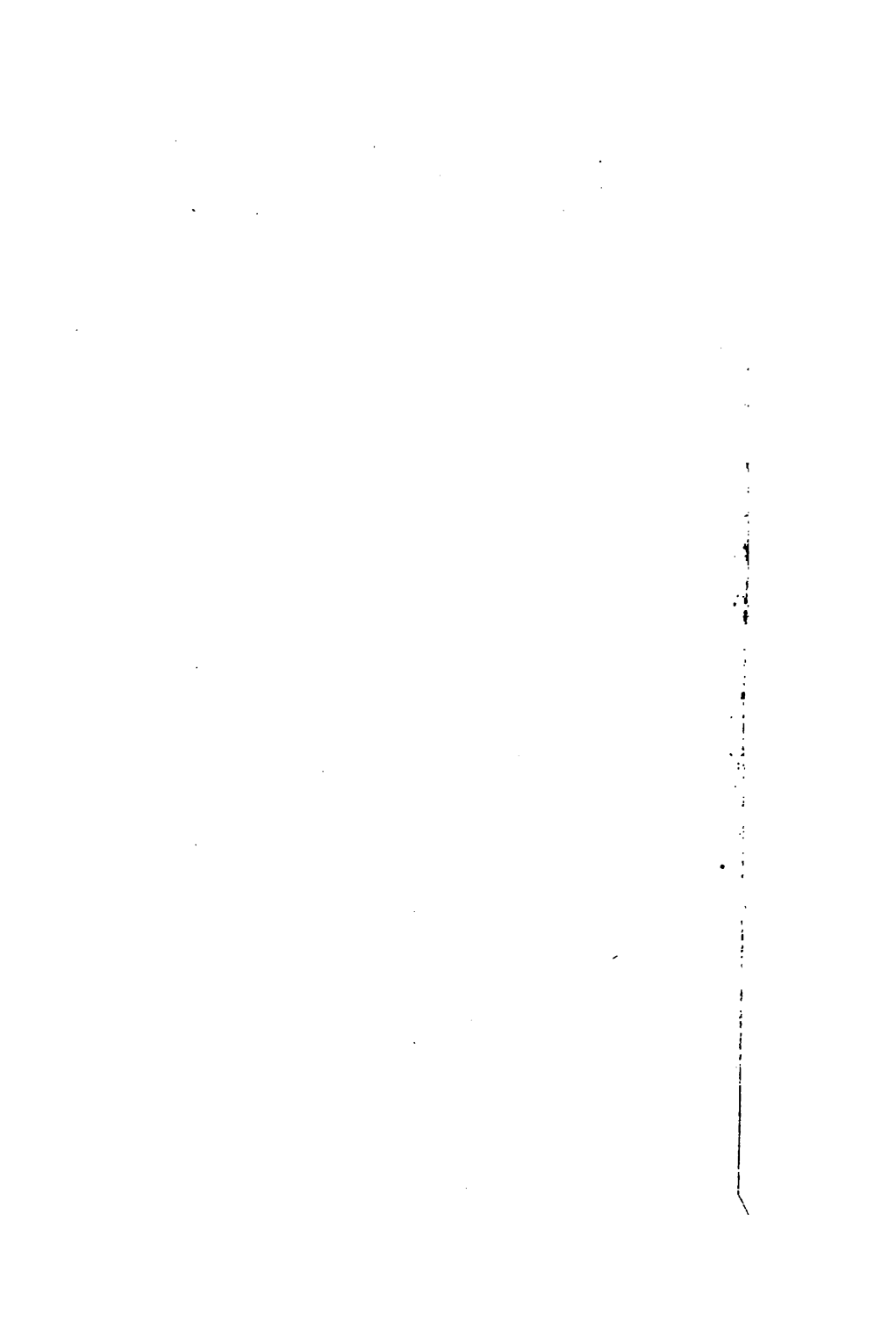


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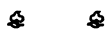
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Mathe



A
Christmas Honeymoon

BY THE SAME AUTHOR



MY LADY PEGGY GOES TO TOWN

A LITTLE TRAGEDY OF TIENTSIN

IF DAVID KNEW

MY LADY PEGGY LEAVES TOWN

ALLEE SAME, &c., &c.

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That was the gist of it, a beautiful woman to be vain of.

A Christmas Honeymoon

by

Frances Fumar Maheux

Illustrated in Color by

Bernard Stogner

New York
Scribner, Macmillan & Co. Publishers

1912



Figure 1. A vertical crack in the rock face.

A Christmas Honeymoon

by

Frances Fyamar Mathews

Illustrated in Color by

Herbert Bohnert



New York
Moffat, Ward and Company

1912

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To

*the man who was good enough to ask me to
write this little story, and to whom
it is a pleasure to inscribe it.*

NEW YORK, August, 1912.

F. A. M.

1290

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
<i>I WHAT BETTY REVERE WROTE TO ANNY DE PEYSTER</i>	1
<i>II HER WOMAN'S WILL: HIS MAN'S WAY . . .</i>	8
<i>III WHEN THE BIRDS CAME HOME</i>	16
<i>IV WHEN THE VIOLIN MAN CAME</i>	25
<i>V WHERE BETTY WENT</i>	34
<i>VI WHAT PETER DID</i>	43
<i>VII WHEN THE WEST CALLED TO THE EAST . .</i>	56
<i>VIII BETTY'S CARTE DE VISITE</i>	67
<i>IX WHAT PETER SAW PASSING HIS DOOR . .</i>	74
<i>X WHERE LITTLE PETER FOUND THE KEY . .</i>	85
<i>XI WHAT PETER VAN ZANDT SAW</i>	96
<i>XII WHEN THE LITTLE MASTER UNLOCKED "THE DOOR"</i>	111
<i>XIII LITTLE PETER'S MISTAKE</i>	116
<i>XIV PETER AND THE LITTLE MARQUIS . . .</i>	124
<i>XV TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS</i>	134
<i>XVI "AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM"</i>	141

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>That was the gist of it, a beautiful woman</i>	
<i>to be vain of</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
<i>Laughing at her own most radiant face</i>	26
<i>The careful tread of two small feet</i>	114
<i>"It is the Christmas tree now I expect"</i>	148

A CHRISTMAS HONEYMOON

CHAPTER I

WHAT BETTY REVERE WROTE TO ANNY
DE PEYSTER

“XMAS Eve in the morning, at Willard's Hotel, Washington, D. C. My dearest girl: I am sitting up with ten pillows at my back; it's only 6 o'clock A. M. but I can't sleep another wink, not that I have slept, for I haven't, not a moment, since I lay down at two A. M. four hours ago, back from the crush at the White House.

“Before I go on another line, Merry Xmas, dear, a thousand of them; I sent you a wee bit of a gift by post last week, but I just had to light five candles on my dressing table, you know how I dislike gas, and give you the news — oh, yes, there is news, Nan, glorious news, too. Dad is to go, positively to Limoges as Consul Gen-

A Christmas Honeymoon

eral. Don't pout, for I, who have always longed to live in France, shall remain here in the States. Why? I hear you ask. Because I am engaged! yes, to marry, whom do you think? Mr. Peter Van Zandt. Hasty, you say. Yes, I suppose so. We had never met until six weeks ago when at the British Embassy we did. It was a case of — no, no, not love, but liking at first sight, and the very next morning his card came up with some flowers, and the next; and the next; and all the mornings since; and he himself every day; he is stopping at this hotel too; and last night at the White House, in a certain corner of the conservatory Betty Revere capitulated: and I'm happier than I quite understand. As for Mr. Van Zandt well, he says he is in heaven. It's to be a late Autumn wedding: Peter says so: and maybe it'll have to be in France, I don't know yet: but what do you think? You remember the big brick double house on the corner of the Square; the house with two front doors, one on Washington Park, the other around the corner? The house we used to pass on our way to school at No. 1 with the silver plate on the door on the Square — and 'Doctor Van Zandt' on it? Well, that is to be my home. Peter is that Doctor Van Zandt's

What Betty Wrote to Anny

son, and that queer old delicious double house was built that double way so that the Doctor's patients should not disturb the Doctor's family. They tell me it's exactly two separate establishments except for a single wide folding door on each floor.

"So I am not to live abroad and we shall not be separated: and you will be my first bridesmaid, and I know Peter will like you, and you Peter; and I do wish his name wasn't Peter! I can never call him that. He's not like a Peter; he's handsome, and big and tall and strong, and a bit stern and very tender; and immensely courtly, and I think we'll never become too intimate, a too intimate man must be frightful to be married to — It's seven o'clock now; my chocolate will be coming up soon. I've been engaged — let me see — seven hours exactly because I know it was just midnight when Peter, in a very masterful way, I must say, took possession: and slipped his great big ring on my finger until he can fetch me a prettier one, he said. Oh, Nan, dear, I wish you could see the flowers Peter has just sent me — a great basket full, dripping over, with little bridal roses and carnations; and the foolish fellow says in his note, 'not as red as your mouth, not as

A Christmas Honeymoon

sweet as your kiss, not as fair as your face'— and in the heart of one of the roses was such a ring! Nan, so brilliant and beautiful: a constellation not a solitaire; I don't like solitaires. I wonder how Peter knew. I suppose Peter has instincts; some men have. Now, I must dress for a round of calls; then dinner here. Peter is to dine with us; then the Xmas-Eve dance at the Madisons'. No one in the whole world knows about Peter and me but you, dear. I am to wear the pink over the blue with the mother of pearl fringe and ribbon roses, you remember? and I wish you were here with all my heart.

"Later: Oh, Nan, such a ball there never was, with such charming surprises: One was a big tissue paper balloon, red, white and blue, hung between the folding doors, after supper Captain Ashleigh, the military attaché, was blindfolded and armed with a wand, his object was to strike the balloon; he failed; in fact four men failed; then Mr. Van Zandt's eyes were bandaged and the wand given to him, with all the company on the qui-vive, I can assure you, for it was a novelty to all of us, and we were surmising what that balloon contained, when Peter (oh, how I wish his name were not Peter!) struck the fatal blow, and

What Betty Wrote to Anny

we were all showered with flour — and with such a multitude of trinkets of silver and silk, and velvet, as never before was seen; some labeled, some not; the men all scrambling to get the prettiest things for their especial girls; the girls grasping at the prettiest masculine things for the especial man! It seems it is a German custom, and certainly it was jolly and charming. Peter, while we were dancing the cotillion (he led and did it to perfection), said that we should have a balloon like that one at the double house our first Christmas there. I wonder if we will! Now, dear Nan, I must close. Write me here at Willard's for the next fortnight. Our movements are uncertain. Dad heard at the State Department that he would be called upon to leave for his post almost immediately owing to the death of his predecessor in office at Limoges, and the vice is ill, so I don't know how things may shape themselves. Peter, not engaged but a few hours if you please, is already quite presumptuous in his remarks approving of early marriages! I am not so sure. Peter is only twenty-one; I am, I mean I will be, eighteen soon. Perhaps it would be nicer to wait a few years. I shall suggest the wisdom of this to Peter to-morrow when we are going for a ride

A. Christmas Honeymoon

together. Captain Ashleigh is loaning us mounts. Oh, I forgot to tell you that the delightful little carriage-house and stable built at the end of the garden of the double house is not empty. Peter has two enchanting, I'm sure they are so from their names, horses, Poppet and Peacock; they are eleven and twelve years old, strawberry roans; and a coupé which is to be done over in white cloth for — a bride! And there are two wonderful old servants. Quite old, but still very immensely serviceable Peter says. Shaddle a butler; he is almost thirty-five; and Supple, her first name is Bridget, who is actually twenty-eight. Don't call me a fly-away, although who knows but that I am! Dad always calls me that; he told Peter — now Nan, what do you think Dad told Peter? In the first place, what do you think Peter told Dad? Nothing less than this: 'Colonel Revere, I am going to marry your daughter if I can win her.' That was said the first time Peter ever saw me. Dad only told me to-day.

"And Dad answered, 'Well, sir, your audacity is not displeasing. Take care though; my daughter is like quicksilver, only she is gold, and I sometimes think no man will ever capture her if he gives her time enough to change her mind. Her mind is

What Betty Wrote to Anny

her own, sir, and she takes surprising liberties with it, I assure you.'

"I wonder if I do?

"Well, dear, *au revoir*. Write me about Ned Davies. Are you still as cruel to him as ever? and believe me to be with sweetest thoughts of you at Bloomingdale, as ever, Betty."

"P. S. If my letter seems more fragmentary and disjointed than usual put it down to the fact that some misguided being in a room near our suite has a violin and plays on it, or with it, in the most excruciatingly horrible way whenever I am in. You know how I loathe violins, save when played by competent artists, and this person is evidently amateur, *au bout des ongles*: A man of course; he draws a strong bow; I despise men who are musical, I mean men who play on violins and pianos and flutes. Betty."

CHAPTER II

HER WOMAN'S WILL: HIS MAN'S WAY

AS Betty had written to her closest friend, Anny De Peyster, Mr. Peter Van Zandt was inclined to be masterful: at the same time he was exceedingly young, a combination which is not rare, it is true, but which, leavened as it was in his case with a fund of patience and a sense of humor, rendered Van Zandt, even at the early age of one-and-twenty, rather of a personage in his particular circle. He was, as Betty, beautiful, willful, perhaps spoilt Betty had written, a handsome man; tremendously well set up; one of the men who was always well groomed, well dressed; unobtrusive but distinctly there; an obvious, unmistakable factor in whatever position or environment he found himself. It is not too much to say that he had thought, reasoned, and reached about as many conclusions as one-and-twenty of the masculine gender can. He was something of a man already; just as Betty, laughing out her seventeen years and the fraction, was a good deal of a woman.

Her Woman's Will

On the afternoon of the day Betty had written to Anny De Peyster, she went with Peter for the ride; Peter had, later, a stag dinner on at the club; some man who was going to be tied up the following week, but he managed to break away from this and got back to Willard's by nine-fifteen. Word came down that Miss Revere was indisposed; word went back, hastily scribbled, that he "must see her, he couldn't get on at all unless he did, that it was four hours now since he had. Etc., etc." Word came back by pencil that "a headache was raging."

Peter went to his room; and scribbled again. "Let me come. I can cure it."

He waited a considerable time for the answer. While he waited, he strove to melt time away by playing upon his violin.

Certainly Peter Van Zandt was the man with the violin.

Then, just as he was in the midst of a very especially fortissimo passage, Betty's reply reached. It ran this way: "I have gotten up and into a frock: my head is splitting. It is all the fault of some wretch who plays the violin in a room below us, or above, or near by! At least he thinks he plays, but the noise is frightful. I wish I could

A Christmas Honeymoon

murder him. You can come in three minutes. Daddy is writing letters in his room. I am in the parlor. Betty."

When Peter had read the note, he smiled, laid the violin on the dressing-table and in less than one minute was in the parlor with Betty.

"He has stopped!" she exclaimed with a delicious little pout, as she contrived not to have Mr. Van Zandt kiss her.

"Who has stopped, dear?"

"The violin man. Did you—you didn't really stop him?" with very wide, almost frightened, eyes.

"Yes, I stopped him."

"Oh! How did you do it? Was he angry? Is he young or old? What did he say?"

"He wasn't angry; he is young; I didn't say anything."

"Peter!"

"I simply took the violin and laid it away from him."

"But—didn't he want to thrash you?"

"No."

"But it must have been an insult."

"Not exactly," Peter laughed. "How's the headache, little sweetheart?"

Her Woman's Will

"It's better."

"Let me smooth it. There. So. Perhaps I inherit some of my father's curative power."

"Who is the violin man, Peter?" Betty always pronounced the name with hesitation and reserves of disapproving taste.

"Oh, he's not a bad chap."

"A friend of yours?"

"Not an enemy, I trust."

"You must know him quite well to have ventured to go into his room and take his violin from him!"

Miss Betty's tone was indicative of a lively interest and an uncurbed curiosity.

"Pretty well."

"Tell me his name, please."

"Oh, dear little girl, how can I? Why should I? This man has incurred your displeasure, caused you pain, distress," his warm lips were on her forehead, "why should I give up his identity to you?"

"Why not?" the eternal feminine wished to know at any hazard, and to her there seemed none at all.

"Because, dear, you are likely to meet him some day, and won't it be more agreeable not to

A Christmas Honeymoon

know — until he himself wishes to tell you — whose violin it was that distressed you? ”

Betty sighed with a contentment born of a line of reasoning that was not without its seductions and its implications of her own supremacy.

“ I suppose so. Will I like him? ” she asked wide-eyed, and after a pause.

“ I hope so. ”

“ You will not be jealous of him, then? ” with no attempt to conceal the suspicious note.

“ No, I think not. ”

“ Don't you know? ”

“ Not exactly. I might be jealous of even him. ”

Betty breathed more freely. “ Do you like the violin yourself — Peter? ”

“ Rather a favorite instrument of mine. ”

“ Yes, to be sure, when well played. ”

“ Yes. Betty darling. ”

“ Well? ”

“ Can't you let go the violin, dear, and just think of me? ”

“ No — Peter — I can't. And I hate to have your name 'Peter.' I do indeed! It doesn't match with you. ”

“ What would match with me? ” he looked

Her Woman's Will

deeply, indulgently, fondly into the lovely face.

Then Betty laughed and hid her eyes and murmured. "Just I."

And there was the laughter of love between them.

"And now you'll forget the violin man, won't you, sweetheart?" he asked.

She shook her head doubtfully. "I'm not so sure. You see, you say I'm likely to meet him, being such a friend of yours; and then, will he want to fetch his violin to — to —"

"Our house?" finished her lover, "eh? is that what you want to know, dear?"

Betty nodded, looking at him squarely with her wonderfully blue eyes.

"Yes," Peter Van Zandt answered, "the violin man will want to fetch his violin to our house," his kiss was on her red lips, "and he will want to play for you."

"I couldn't stand it. I hate musical men, I mean men who play on musical instruments: they're always very effeminate." Betty rose.

"Are they?" Peter Van Zandt instinctively glanced at his own hand, which was as powerful as a stonecutter's sledge hammer, for all its whiteness of flesh and pinkness of nail.

A Christmas Honeymoon

"Yes, I am sure of it. Peter — if you were a musician of any sort or kind, I'd send you flying. I certainly would. It would spoil all the rest of you."

"Would it?" Peter had risen, too, of course, and had his arms around his little love. "Ah, no, my own, if you loved me, and if I were musical you would still love, is it not so?"

Betty withdrew; her black brows contracted; her starry eyes were dimmed almost as if with tears.

"No, it's not so, Peter, at all. I may be queer and silly, but! — After all," then she laughed for all the world as April might laugh at January and clapped her hands; and then laid them softly upon Peter's shoulders, and took a deep breath adding, "you're not a musical man and so why should we disturb ourselves about your friend of the violin?"

He prisoned her face between his palms; he prisoned her glance in his. "And would you really cast me off if, well, say, if I were the violin man?"

Betty, with bewitching smiles and gay little curves and flutes of mirth, nodded her imprisoned head and said, "Yes, I would."

Her Woman's Will

Again he kissed her; halted, made to speak out, held his peace, and laughed with those reservations of prophecy which even very young men allow themselves in connection with the girl they love.

CHAPTER III

WHEN THE BRIDE CAME HOME

BETTY REVERE and Peter Van Zandt were married at Grace Church. It was admitted to have been the most beautiful wedding New York then had ever seen, with the most beautiful bride and the most gallant and proud bridegroom; Anny De Peyster was maid of honor, there were eleven bridesmaids and twenty-two ushers; the company overflowed to the sidewalk and the music was from the organ and an orchestra. And such music. No wedding marches, no voices breathing o'er Eden: instead, waltzes, the gayest of the gay, all the tunes that were liked best in those far off days. *Il bacio*, *Una Palomita*, and the rest. Betty was of a mind to go off, tripping to the measures her small feet loved the best, and it was noted that she fairly danced up the aisle, and certainly down it, although keeping well in step with Peter's stately tread.

Why did she have twenty-two ushers and only eleven maids? "Because," laughed the bride,

When the Bride Came Home

"every girl should have two cavaliers so that not either one of them might be too happy, and so that she might choose and not be forced into boredom." Colonel Revere gave his daughter in marriage, sailing the next day for his post in France.

When the merriment was at its highest, when the music was the sweetest, Peter and his wife stole down the rear staircase of the old St. Nicholas Hotel, where Betty and her father had been stopping; she, wrapped in an army cloak; and into a coach, and off for Boston and Niagara before one grain of rice or a single slipper had been thrown at them.

By-and-by through a little hole in the walls of the garden of Paradise, these two slipped back, into the double house on the corner of Washington Square, Peter darting up the steps and unlocking the door himself, then down again to catch her up and carry her in his arms up and into her own house.

"Welcome home, sweet wife of my soul!" and up he carried her to her own rooms on the second floor, with Shaddle busying himself with luggage in the vestibule; with Miss Bridget Supple gathering together satchels, shawl-straps and valises, both exchanging glances. Shaddle's

A Christmas Honeymoon

somewhat sheepish and suggestive, Miss Supple's, arch yet forbidding, as indeed had been the case between these two for lo! these past many years.

When the trunks were all taken up and the light luggage, too; when Supple had discovered that she was not wanted above, and therefore had come down to assist Shaddle in looking over the table and seeing that everything was in exact form, Shaddle was found standing, thoughtfully leaning against the mantel corner twirling a ring around on his large thumb. Miss Bridget Supple had seen that ring before, several times: she came into the dining-room, drew the folding doors closer between the drawing-room, arranged the curtains, even advanced to the hearth and poked the logs a little; lifted the bellows, and began to puff them.

"Bridget!" exclaimed Shaddle.

No attention was paid. Miss Supple continued to ply her bellows. "Biddy!" Miss Supple vouchsafed a glance.

"Ah, Biddy darlin', what's the use of waitin' any longer? Won't you make it Christmas Eve?"

Miss Supple, from sheer force of long habit, maybe, shook her head.

"Yes, you will!" Shaddle persisted. "Isn't

When the Bride Came Home

the young master's example a good one? and if we keep on like this we'll soon be too old for it altogether!"

"Never too old," exclaimed Miss Supple.

"Maybe not," with a doubtful emphasis; "but make it Christmas Eve at St. Joseph's, won't you?"

Miss Supple had parried these suggestions for many revolving years. Rising from the hearth she replied. "Let's wait a bit, Shad."

"'Wait a bit!'" retorted the butler. "I've waited and waited and waited. Biddy, what are we waitin' for now?"

"To see how this," the serving-woman lifted her eyes to the room overhead, "turns out."

"Are you crazy? 'Turns out!' With the two of them clean wild for one another, how could it turn out? And even if it didn't, what reason is that for you and me to be keepin' from havin' our banns read?" Shaddle rearranged his forks with an undue clatter.

"Wait a bit," reiterated Miss Supple adjusting her cap at the mirror in the pier. "It's not us that should be after leavin' them two young things to themselves just at the start."

"Isn't it?" cried Shaddle irately.

A Christmas Honeymoon

"Of course we wouldn't be leavin' for good and all, but only for a fortnight's vacation like; it wouldn't be right, though. Mrs. Van Zandt'll be needin' me, Shad, and the young master can't get on without you."

"Can't he! But I'm to get on without you, Biddy?"

"Whisht! Ain't I here in the same house with you?" Mr. Shaddle seemed to find assuagement in the eyes of Miss Supple, who, however, promptly eliminated personal sentiment, by asking, "How do you like the new mistress?"

"She's as fine as silk, Biddy."

"That she is, with eyes in her head like diamonds."

"He worships her."

"That he does."

"Ah, go on, now, Shad, them napkins is tumbling over and the smilax wreaths are fallin' from the chandelier."

Shaddle, dissuaded thus from mere romance, replaced the smilax, stood the plate-warmer in front of the glowing fire and then vanished into his pantry.

That first dinner went off admirably: many another with friends and relatives at the board:

When the Bride Came Home

Anny De Peyster and Ned Davies, of course. Fast following days when Peter went down to his law office in Nassau Street, when Betty, under Bid-dy's cheerful guidance, got inklings of the house-keeping she knew nothing at all of. Little surprises for Peter when he came home toward five o'clock: little bits of wifely comfortings as to warm slippers, house coats laid out, and brushes at hand.

Sometimes the coupé and Poppet and Peacock prancing in their new harness, down Broadway to Nassau to fetch Peter home: sometimes to carry him down town in the morning. Evenings at the opera, the theatre: quieter times at home in the library, or rather in each library by turns, for there were two, of course.

It was an actual double house over which Mrs. Van Zandt was called upon to preside. On each floor merely the big archway connecting the two quite separate establishments, and no communication at all in the garrets.

Peter had, when refurnishing the double house completely for his bride, taken the keys of the archway doors — there were doors? to be sure; solid mahogany, inches thick, polished as glass, now flung wide with curtains looped aside to frame

A Christmas Honeymoon

them — Peter then had taken the three keys, tied them together and carried them up to the garret of the half of the house farthest from the Square. He hung them on a peg and said, "We will never want them, but let them alone just for the sake of the governor who's gone on."

So it was, after all the old physician's painstaking years of sequestration of his profession from his family, now one big single house roamed over by the restless feet of Betty Van Zandt.

This very day she had been herself dusting Peter's library: they called the library in the Washington Square half, Peter's, because there were none but law books there, and Betty, for mischief, had just put a couple of sentimental novels on the table and a copy of *Harper's* and of *Godey's*: then she had frisked out into the garden. Such a delicious garden as it was with the high spiked iron fence matted with arbor-vitaes all the year round: with box-bordered paths all gravelly beneath her slippered feet; with a little fountain and deep shade of horse-chestnut and fruit trees: an arbor thatched with grape vines, seats here and there: and flowers! all the sweet old-fashioned kinds in their seasons, pansies and sweet Alice; lady-slipppers, holly-hocks, lilies of the valley; mar-

When the Bride Came Home

igolds, dahlias; bleeding-hearts; larkspur, bluebells, foxgloves; fuchsias, Mexican sage, snowballs; lilacs; in small formal beds marked out by box way up to the stable and carriage house. Betty had put on one of her prettiest frocks, a black silk skirt, and an over-gown that I think they called a Dolly Varden — a panniered, ruffled, fichued bit of daintiness with bunches of posies, pink and green and violet on a creamy ground; Betty's hair, in a wonderful waterfall with a beaded net confining somewhat its exuberant tendency to curl all over her pretty head, had then frisked out into her garden to gather a posy for the table.

They were to dine alone that evening, just Betty and Peter. They had been married exactly three months, and Peter had said in a lordly way that he hoped no one would drop in around six-thirty; a man wanted his wife to himself sometimes, etc., etc., at all of which Mistress Betty had laughed joyously. Had there been such a thing in those days as a telephone, she would promptly have put it into commission and had guests to tease her husband with.

As it was, for she was a child full of whimsies, conceits, little rebellions, getting away from the routine of things, Betty, instead of being at the

A Christmas Honeymoon

vestibule to greet Peter on the third monthly reminder of her wedding day, elected to sit demurely in the garden listening for the click of the night-key in the latch.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE VIOLIN MAN CAME

SHE heard it. 'Also heard inquiring tones, and Shaddle's subdued replies: quick plunging footsteps up the stairs: down again; out the back door; into the garden; up the broad, central path. Betty fled from her seat in the arbor and darted back into the house, ran up the stairs and stood dimpling, mirthful on the landing, while Peter searched.

"Sure," observed Miss Supple to her inamorato, "they're like two childer."

"Ah, yes, but they're grown up for all that!" was the butler's sage rejoinder.

Betty stood there full five minutes: she was sure she had heard Peter come into the house: sure she had heard his voice and Shaddle's.

To be sure she had, but not to discern the words.

Mr. Van Zandt had asked Shaddle where a certain thing was; a thing the serving-man had noted that his master had not touched in months

A Christmas Honeymoon

now. He had fetched it; Peter had taken it: Biddy had seen her young master unfastening the case, drawing forth the contents: then she had beckoned the butler away to his pantry, and there the two faithful souls stood together quite breathless and poignant, watching, waiting for they didn't precisely know what.

Their mistress, too, stood, now, on the threshold of her own room, the door ajar, her lips parted, her ear bent.

Where, then, was Peter?

If he could tarry, she was assuredly in no haste: she withdrew, pushed the door closer, flung herself into a chair, dallied with a powder puff, a handglass laughing at her own most radiant face.

As she laughed in sheer joy over the beauty of herself and of Peter's possession of that beauty, and over the lesson she would teach Peter as to his patience; all, all, to end in his kisses on her mouth, Betty heard a sound, a wail, a mellowed but piercing scrape. She put her hands up to her ears, then took them down.

It was a violin.

A violin played by an unadept hand.

It must be Peter's friend, the violin man of Willard's, fetched home by Peter for dinner.



Laughing at her own most radiant face.

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When the Violin Man Came

'And Peter had said, "Let us be all alone this evening, dear little girl, please."

'And Betty had said, "yes."

It was certainly horrid of Peter to fetch home a guest, and above all that violin man on this particular evening, and beyond everything it certainly was ungenerous of Peter to announce the violin man, or to let him announce himself in this remarkably informal fashion.

Doubtless the violin man was a genius: geniuses were unpleasant folk: Peter would surely be coming up soon to tell her: or at least if the violin friend was so determinedly intimate, Shaddle would be sent with his card or his name.

Mrs. Van Zandt sat down again. But all the while the violin was wailing, calling, searching, with its strange, weird, pussy-cat voice resounding up and down and all over the big double house, quite as if it were at its accustomed haunt; and Betty's roses grew a deeper red, her lips quivered, her eyes flashed with the near-by tears.

Did Peter then think that his wife would come down at the call of this violin man? Did Peter wish his wife to answer such a weird and jesting announcement?

He could not.

A Christmas Honeymoon

The violin man must be an uncontrollable boor. She should sit still right there in her own room, until Peter came or sent.

Below in the butler's pantry Shaddle sat on the shelf dangling his heels, listening; Miss Supple at the crack in respectful attendance at call of either master or mistress: both speechless but quite uncomprehending.

No one summoned them.

Betty, above, heard the shriek, the long attenuated moan of the strings coming to her: there seemed a sort of witchery in the excruciating inartisticness of the quivering tones. She got up, came to the door: opened it. Certainly the violin man must be at the foot of the stairs, even up at the first landing: she drew back.

Then Peter spoke. "Betty!"

But this did not obtain reply. Mistress Betty was of no mind to be summoned thus informally while the violin man went patiently on with his bow.

"Darling!" came to Betty's astonished ears.

Then "Sweetheart!" reached her outraged hearing.

Then Peter laughed, his mirth seeming to chime in queerly with a wild dissonant strain from the

When the Violin Man Came

violin. It smote her brain and heart, and made them ache.

It even made the discreet butler and serving-woman in the pantry glance at each other in a strange, bewildered fashion.

"Betty!" came up to her again.

She tiptoed out of her room, to the railing; she looked down the square well of the staircase, and saw her husband, standing alone in the hall, holding a violin under his chin, drawing the bow with that peculiar caressing emphasis which is more especially the manifestation of the person who wants to play on the violin and can't.

Her big eyes dilated, her slim figure quivered, her lips and cheeks were as white as her teeth; with her two little hands she gripped the railing and looked over, down, at her husband below.

Van Zandt glanced up eager, expectant, waiting for her.

"Peter," she ejaculated in a curious, hushed voice.

"Yes, love-girl, it's I;" he played on.

"I see you." Then he looked up at her face again, seeing the bloom of it no longer there; but he played on, little straggling attempts, wheedling

A Christmas Honeymoon

the strings into, what he perhaps fancied, was a melody.

"Come down," he said buoyantly.

Betty came down obediently, her hand upon the rail for steadying perhaps.

Then, not relinquishing his violin, he put out his arms to enclose her with it.

Betty held aloof, unresponsive.

"Were you the violin man of Willard's yourself?" She asked in a thin small voice, brittle as Dresden china, with a little break-of-heart in every syllable it uttered.

"Yes!" Peter laughed again, full of youth, masculinity, possession, and radiating his lack of knowledge of womankind as brilliantly as man ever did.

"You are jesting, Peter!" her sweet eyes quickly sought the guest, hither, yon; in the shadows of the long hallway; her sweet breath fluttering with ecstasy at the thought that her husband was but masquerading, that the real violin man was of course in hiding and would come forth to be presented.

He did not.

There was merely Peter who played on in a fantastic fashion, meant to be alluring, coaxing,

When the Violin Man Came

conclusive, expletive of the dominant sex coming into all its own.

"Not jesting?" the little wife said with a falling inflection: the husband shook his head.

"It was absolutely you those days in Washington?"

"Yes."

"And you never told me the truth?"

"No."

"Why not?" Slowly and painfully the words were spoken.

"Because," he cried out gleefully, "because with your adorable perversity, I might have lost you if I had."

"But the truth," she exclaimed with the reverential reproach of a child.

"It went by the board, I'm afraid," he laid the violin in the niche in the wall. "Come, little lady, I've not had my kiss," he put out his arms.

But Betty hung back. "Don't you remember I said I'd have to send you flying if you'd been a musical man?"

"Yes, of course I do; and for that reason, I never touched my violin from that hour to this. You're safely mine now, dear, and you won't be

A Christmas Honeymoon

so foolish as not to want me to amuse myself with my bow a while every day?"

Mrs. Van Zandt did not answer.

Shaddle coughed discreetly just then as he emerged from the dining-room to announce that dinner was served.

It was a curious meal. The mistress polite, even amiable, with a sad submission in her speech and manner; the young husband over-gay, yet triumphant. He had ideas of being lord and master in his own house, his own pursuits, his own ways; adoring her none the less, but filled with the pious and perfect theory of man's superior wisdom and the duty of husbands to see that they were not too easy in even the sweetest of traces.

And Betty?

It all looked like a wreck to her. The silver, the crystal, the tall old brass candlesticks, the big logs on the hearth, the family portraits, the brilliant posy of a centerpiece, her own furbelows, the clink of the wine glasses, the soft tread of Shaddle and Supple; to her all these were nothing else than a devastation: but the wreck of wrecks was the overthrow of her own supremacy, that in which he had most minutely taught her to implicitly believe, swept to bits by this violin.

When the Violin Man Came

So it is: first we play at love; then a little later, maybe, we learn to play with love; later on, perhaps, Love plays with us; and by-and-by, if we are not too spent, when the most beautiful thing in the world comes our way, that second glorious, conscious conquering youth of Power, we become one with Love, and it is very well with us.

What does masculine one-and-twenty know of the magnificent pulsations of twice his years? What does fair feminine seventeen know of the later harvest of splendid fruition that comes to the woman seventeen more years her senior? Little indeed.

So, quite seemingly submissive, full of daintiness and courtesy on the wife's part; quite charming, gentle, a bit nettled, but self-satisfied in his position and glad all was over with and discovered, on the husband's, the dinner was eaten.

Shaddle in the recesses of his pantry tapped Miss Supple on the shoulder, jerked his thumb toward the dining-room, his usually immovable countenance all an interrogation point.

Bridget Supple, nodding sagely, said, in her emphasis a note of wholesome warning,

"That's married life, Mr. Shaddle."

CHAPTER V.

WHERE BETTY WENT

“BETTY VAN ZANDT; Betty Van Zandt.”

Over and over again the girl who had only been Betty Van Zandt a little more than three months kept repeating her name to herself the night through. It seemed to her that she was hammering the letters out on the plate of a coffin. The ground had been swept from under her feet, the whole structure of her wooing, wedding, and short married life tumbled to pieces as she saw it passing in review before her. She was not distracted, or hysterical, or swooning; Betty was not of that calibre; she looked it all in the face, in the eyes, and made her determinations, or possibly her determinations made her. She argued and pleaded for him, but it was of no avail. The naked truth remained that he had deceived her.

But about the violin! Could one be so stupid as to resent so little, little a thing?

Where Betty Went

But it was the very littleness of it that stung.

And to her, with her curiously, acutely sensitized mentality and fibre, that violin was no little thing after all. It was the biggest thing just then in her world.

Could she ever be, or feel to, Peter as she had before she knew?

Betty was sure that she could not. Could she live on and on all her life and his, listening to the violin and remembering the tragedy of its deceit? She could not do that.

What should she do? Go up to Bloomingdale to Anny? Tell Anny?

No. She could do neither one. Nobody could be told.

If she could be buried away somewhere afar off and try to smother the shame and humiliation of it. Yes, that was it, shame and humiliation. Peter, whom she had looked up to and revered; Peter, whom she had so joyously vowed to "obey"; Peter, to have played her a subterfuge, a trick; and then to laugh at her, and think to coax her into a reconciliation with the noise she detested, and which grated on her soul as the saw might grate on raw flesh.

By daylight, Betty knew what she must do. It

A Christmas Honeymoon

would be done quietly and without speech. Words she and Peter must not have. At the breakfast table she was, as usual; a bit grave, but not more so than he could account for to himself as being relevant to a young wife's awakening to the fact that her every caprice could not be regarded with too much veneration.

Peter had to come out into the garden to find her for good-by, however, when he was starting for down town.

Betty was cutting flowers, big crimson dahlias and marigolds, and sprays of asparagus, and she made the blithest figure in her flowered frock with a little cape of Shetland wool about her shoulders, all her curls blowing, her eyes over-brilliant with the wakefulness of the past night, her cheeks a-flame with fever.

"But you are the loveliest girl that ever lived!" he exclaimed staring at his wife, hat in hand. "Betty, do you know how beautiful you are?"

She nodded: "Yes, exactly."

"We will go to the Ogden's party to-night, don't forget; don't tire yourself. I want them to see you as you look now. I shall be so proud of you!"

She glanced up at him, laughed a little, and

Where Betty Went

turned to her flowers. That was the gist of it; a beautiful woman to be vain of: her lips did quiver, but with superb pride she turned the quiver into mirth.

"Kiss me good-by," he asserted.

"Not out here."

"Come in the house, then!"

"No. Good-by, Peter." She did not even extend her hand.

"Is it because of the violin?" he laughed.

"I expect so," she was sorting her posies.

"Now, Betty, look here, dear; if a man can't have the freedom of practicing a bit on a favorite instrument in his own home, you know; it's not reasonable."

"It doesn't sound reasonable," she answered.

"Well, then?" with considerable impatience as he pulled out his watch.

Betty's pretty shoulders went up a trifle; her head went to one side; she was choosing, apparently, whether to put one more dahlia in her bouquet or not; she did not look at Peter; if she had, tears would have scalded her eyes, brave bonny eyes with the sun shining on them.

"Will you kiss me, or won't you?" he asked with an angry emphasis.

A Christmas Honeymoon

His wife shook her head. And Peter went down to Nassau Street.

As soon as the front door had closed Betty sprang to her feet; the flowers fell to the path; she was indoors and the morning paper in her hand in less time than it occupies to set it down. The shipping list was scanned. The *Spain* sailed the following day "at 6 A. M. for Havre; passengers must be on board the night before."

Mrs. Van Zandt went upstairs. Two of her trunks the "Paradise trunks," Peter had called them, still stood in her little dressing-room, a few trifles still remaining there to be taken out.

Inside of three hours she had packed them and a valise, with her clothing and a few small belongings: she had ordered the coupé; dressed; driven to the steamship office; engaged passage and stateroom under her maiden name; driven back to the double house; ordered dinner, and gone out again, this time on foot.

Into East Tenth Street to order a coach from the livery stable she knew was there; this done, Mrs. Van Zandt, having to pass Grace Church on her way, halted at the gate, faltered a little, then went in; went to the pew Peter owned where

Where Betty Went

she and Peter had sat Sundays since their return, and knelt down.

Betty couldn't pray, as prayers are made in fitting words and phrases: hers was a torn and wrenched heart desiring to spend itself in just one outward throb that might reach to the Divine ear and not to any human one.

Was she doing wrong? This did not occur to her.

She was Betty, and Betty could not go on living any sort of lie-life with the man who had gotten her by fraud. Because, you see, so intricate and strange are the complexities of some natures, Betty would not have married Peter Van Zandt if she had known about his violin.

Which may reveal the fact that Betty was incapable of love, or then again it may prove the proposition that seventeen never is capable of that emotion in its supreme entirety.

Her sobs came fast, her hands were clenched together in bitterness and loneliness; her eyes, behind her mecklin veil, were large with tears.

Then she heard someone speaking near her: hushed women's voices, two of them, as they were busy with the altar cloths and flower vases, it being Friday.

A Christmas Honeymoon

One said, "I thought they were to be married at Thanksgiving?"

"No, not until Christmas. Christmas is such a perfect time in itself, I think the wedding should be either before or after."

"Yes, so do I. Christmas should not be paired with anything. Wasn't the Van Zandt-Revere wedding lovely?"

"Exquisite. I never saw such a perfect bride and bridegroom."

"Yes: theirs is a real happiness."

Betty's lip curled; then the sobs came shaking her to her soul; then she rose from her knees and went home.

She wrote, a line only, to her husband and left it in his library on top of the *Godey's Lady's Book*, quite near the violin-case. It ran this way:

"I am going to father. Betty."

Then presently the coach came and the astounded Shaddle beheld the driver fetch down the two trunks and the valise and put them on; beheld his young mistress coming down the stairs with her reticule and long shawl on her arm, just as when she had arrived from her wedding-tour.

Betty said, "Shaddle, I am going on a journey, very suddenly necessary. This is for you and

Where Betty Went

Supple. Supple is out, I know; she has gone to Dean's for the lady-cake Mr. Van Zandt likes."

"Thank you, madam. Indeed, madam, I'm sorry you're not taking Bridget with you to wait upon you."

"Thank you, Shaddle, I shall be able to wait upon myself for a few days, I am sure."

She got into the coach, the faithful butler wistful, compassionate, troubled to the last, his hand reluctant to let go the coach door.

But it had to be shut.

No directions were given; the driver evidently knew his goal. With Shaddle shading his eyes with his broad palm, staring after her, Betty started away from her husband's house toward her father's.

When Miss Supple got back with the lady-cake, Shaddle told her: both of them white and trembling with apprehension talked long and earnestly.

Then Saddle urged: "Biddy, darlin', let's have our banns read on Sunday, eh? and not be runnin' risks any longer."

"'Risks,' is it, Shad?" Miss Supple retorted. "I'd like to know what kind of risks there is in stoppin' as we are, in comparison of a young thing like that's goin' off three months after her weddin'

A Christmas Honeymoon

day, all alone, nobody knows where! in a hired coach. Tell me that!"

Shaddle couldn't tell Miss Supple that at all. Bridget added, "Time enough for our banns to be read, Shad, when the young mistress gets back. There's somethin' in her that I love."

"Supposin' she never comes back!"

"Then our banns'll never be read."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT PETER DID

MR. VAN ZANDT was late in getting from his office that day; he looked up at Betty's windows and saw lights shining through the filmy lace curtains. Poor Bridget had turned every jet as high as possible, Shaddle had the biggest logs of his store burning on the hearth, and the two, one hovering to open the door, the other ambushed in the pantry, awaited the master's footstep. No need for his key; the butler opened wide, and Peter sprang in expecting his wife's laughter at the threshold; or did he not expect it? Had he one of those mysterious things called an apprehension?

No one might know; he said good evening to Shaddle, threw a short glance around and up the stairs; then into the drawing-room; the library; across, through the arch into the other half of the double house, stepping into his library: picturing all the while, her fond little arms, her

A Christmas Honeymoon

perfect lips, her tender, cooing voice, the goodness and warmth and comfort and bliss of her: shortly to be found, enjoyed, revelled in. Perchance a little bit of submission; most delicious; and certainly, by-and-by he should be playing to her on the despised violin, she listening, won over, conquered.

Yes, that would be it, conquered.

To conquer. To be conquered. Exactly what the man and the woman each wants: but the process of achievement must be always adequate, always adjusted in a fashion that masculine one-and-twenty knows nothing at all about.

Peter, of course, did not find Betty in the law library; he came slowly back to the other half, the half they mostly lived in, and as slowly mounted the stairs.

Betty was not in her room or her dressing-room: he did not note the absence of the trunks; Betty was not in his dressing-room: nor was she on the floor above.

But, the enchanting little witch was in hiding in the garret, of course.

Peter went to the garret. It was a big place, extending all over both halves of the double house. The rafters were black and cobwebby

What Peter Did

and strung and hung with all manner of garments; there were dusty engravings, cracked mirrors, rusty Franklin stoves; spinning wheels; barrel chairs in faded chintz; calf-skin trunks with brass nails; Hessian boots covered with mold; his father's old saddle; a pillow; a spinet; piles of *La Belle Assemblée* and annuals; rickety tables; three-legged chairs; Leghorn bonnets; sleigh-bells; the key to the big dividing doors that he had so lately hung on their peg; a scrap of pink and yellow ribbon under his feet; the reflection of his own figure in a cracked cheval glass, holding the candlestick in his hand, but there was no Betty.

Mr. Van Zandt came down to the first floor.

No one was yet to be seen.

In fact, Shaddle and Miss Supple were wedged in their pantry, palpitating with a great and suppressed excitement; neither one daring to emerge or to offer explanation.

Van Zandt thought, "She has gone out; up to Bloomingdale to the De Peyster's, to give me a little fright; but I will not follow her; no, no; a man must not give in too far; she will come home by ten."

He dressed for dinner, sat down and ate. He smoked a cigar or two, pacing the front hall after

A Christmas Honeymoon

the servants had gone below. He watched the tall old clock in its niche between the drawing-room and library doors, until the hands pointed to ten.

Then he crossed again into the other half of his house; into the law library, and, scanning the table, he at last saw Betty's envelope. He opened and read. He stood still, the frail, bitter little paper weapon grasped in his sledge-hammer hand.

That was it; the giant, the man, powerless in the flutter of the butterfly's wings; blinded by the little, little thing; a littler thing even than the violin that had wrecked his wife's young life.

He sat down, still holding the tiny sheet; and he sat there, nearly motionless, until morning.

Shaddle and Supple sat up all night, too, waiting for a possible summons; watching for, they could not even surmise, what.

The chilly, pallid sun of the Indian Summer slanted in alike upon master and man, and maid; but no word was spoken between them.

Shaddle went up and laid out his master's fresh clothes, filled his tub, put the morning paper on the candle-stand beside his untouched bed, then slipped down again to the kitchen.

What Peter Did

The breakfast was announced, but although the master sat at meat, he ate not a morsel: and only drank half the cup of coffee that Supple in silence poured for him.

Afterwards he went out, and he did not come back for three days. Shaddle and Bridget were frightened to death almost; visions of suicide, murder and kindred horrors distorting all their waking, and sleeping hours, as well.

By-and-by Mr. Van Zandt did come home.

No one knew until long years after where and how, he had spent those seventy-two hours. When he returned it was on foot, unshaven, unkempt and haggard; aged by years; but with no syllable of either inquiry or explanation. He made his toilette, took some breakfast, and drove down to his office in the white satin-lined coupé he had made into so soft and bride-like a nest for Betty Revere.

Once at the office he wrote, in a firm and rapid hand, to his father-in-law at Limoges; merely this: "Colonel John Paul Revere, American Consul-General, Limoges, France. My dear sir:— You will do me the honor to receive each month for the future, one-half of my inherited income, one-half of my income from whatever law practice I

A Christmas Honeymoon

may have: it will reach you by check through Rothschild & Co., Bankers of Paris, and I shall highly esteem the condescension of your conveying the same monthly, to my wife, your daughter, Betty Revere Van Zandt. You will also, my dear sir, I am sure, do me the further favor of conveying the intelligence to Mrs. Van Zandt that the house on the Square is to be immediately altered into two distinct dwellings; the masons and carpenters will be at work to-morrow; the half which Mrs. Van Zant did me the honor of occupying will remain intact as she was pleased to leave it; always ready for her occupancy at any moment; the passage-ways will be walled up; the carriage-house will be secluded from the Square part of the establishment and be solely at Mrs. Van Zandt's service. The garden will be unequally divided by a high, brick wall, leaving Mrs. Van Zandt in entire possession of the paths, flowers, graperies, etc., etc. Bridget Supple will live in Mrs. Van Zandt's half of the house, and will hold herself in complete readiness at all times to serve her mistress. I have the honor to be, my dear Colonel Revere, your obedient servant and son-in-law, Peter Van Zandt. New York, November 10, 18—."

What Peter Did

This was mailed and went out by the ship sailing that very day for Havre.

All the things that Peter Van Zandt had mentioned in his letter to Colonel Revere were promptly done: his orders carried out to the letter. Bridget agreed, more than willingly, to live on in her accustomed quarters: it would not be lonely since the two basement doors in reality opened upon one area; the back doors of both kitchens were alongside of each other; Shaddle was to remain in his place and Miss Supple was to do the cooking for her master, and all the general work of the bachelor quarters that were evidently to be maintained in the Washington Square side of Doctor Van Zandt's big house.

In a fortnight the walls, then, were built, the arches filled, the new plaster dried, and papered in the semblance of marble columns like the rest of the halls; heavy curtains, too, were hung over the archways, and Peter Van Zandt after that, retired to his half of the house and never again in long, long years put his foot inside his wife's side of the old brick mansion.

As soon as the workmen began to be busy he had gone to the New York hotel and stopped there; when the repairs were finished, it was his

A Christmas Honeymoon

order that Shaddle should so report to him. Everything now being finished, Shaddle was polishing his boots in the garden outside of the kitchen window: Bridget was inside rolling out pastry: she opened her sash for the kitchen was hot.

"Shad!"

"Yes, Biddy?"

"Do you think if the master finds it out he'll be after killin' us?"

"Sure, don't be silly; what have we got to do with it?"

"Oh, haven't we, though!"

"He can't know it if you don't tell him."

"Then maybe he'd blame the boss-builder and call him in, and make him do it; and we'd get sent away for interferin'."

"No," Shaddle shook his head. "The young master'll never find it out; he'll never look behind thim curtains, I know!"

"It was bold of us, anyhow."

"It was yourself, Biddy, with your big heart as thought of leavin' the first floor arch as it was; it was yourself that wheedled the boss-builder; it was yourself that confessed it to Father O'Shaughnessy and got absolution for meddlin' with your superiors."

What Peter Did

"So it was." Bridget left the pastry-board and sat down and cried tempestuously. "Sure it was me myself that did all that same, thinkin' all the time that whin the young creature comes back, how sad she'd be to find the road to him blocked up like that."

"Ah, don't be cryin', Biddy, you're in the right of it always. Sure I'm thinkin' the day'll soon come when the young master'll be glad enough that there's one door leadin' to the mistress's part of the old house that ain't barred ag'in him, except by the turnin' of a key in the lock."

"She'll come home! Ah, she must come home to him!" wailed Miss Supple, "and him the light of her eyes, and her the apple of his!"

"Biddy!" Shaddle dropped his blacking-brush hastily and thrust a hand through the wide iron bars of the kitchen window, seizing Bridget's floury fingers. "Say! mayn't I go beyond and tell Father O'Shaughnessy to read our banns next week?"

Shaddle had, he thought, caught his Dulcinea in a melting mood.

But Bridget cast a deeply reproachful glance through her bars, jerked her hand back to its rolling-pin, and answered:

A Christmas Honeymoon

"Sure, men has no hearts at all, at all. Shad, I'll not have no banns read, as I told you, until the mistress comes home."

"Then the Lord help us!" responded the butler, "may she come in the next ship!"

"She won't do that same; but she'll come," was Miss Supple's not altogether comforting rejoinder.

Mr. Van Zandt left the hotel that evening immediately after Shaddle's visit. He came back to his home, entering now and always by the Washington Square door, the door his father had been accustomed to use for all the years of his professional life. As the serving-man and woman had foreseen, he never pushed aside the curtains they had so artfully hung, to inspect the work: in fact it was an intense relief to him not to see the new walls, not to have to look at the solid dividing barrier.

For a while he lead his life quite, so far as one could see, as usual; only not mingling with his kind. Men never ventured to ask Peter Van Zandt one question; nor women either; there was tacit silence between him and his acquaintances, whatever surmises they made among themselves.

What Peter Did

No one knew where Mrs. Van Zandt was until Anny De Peyster had a letter from her at Limoges: and in this Betty vouched no more of an explanation than her husband.

Anny wrote.

Betty answered: a correspondence that was between the lines, and wherein Anny proved herself the invaluable, wonderful friend a woman can be when she is made of the right materials.

On the night when Peter had left the New York hotel and returned to his own roof, he had called Shaddle to him in his library. Shaddle saw the violin lying on the big table, also the *Godey's Lady's Book* and the little envelope addressed to his master.

"Shaddle."

"Yes, sir?"

"You see this table, these papers, books, violin-case, all these things on it?"

"I do, Mr. Van Zandt."

"Well, I want them to remain just so. No finger to touch them; no dusting, no moving at any time."

"Yes, sir."

"And you will tell Bridget."

A Christmas Honeymoon

"I shall, sir. Sure, sir, you know if it's your will, me and Bridget, sir, 'd die before we'd let a breath come near them."

"Very good. I believe you. And, Shaddle, see to it always, every night without fail, remember, and tell Supple, too; light the gas jets, all of them, in Mrs. Van Zandt's rooms as soon as twilight comes on, and let them burn until morning."

"Yes, sir."

Shaddle went down to Bridget. "Sure, Biddy," he concluded his orders with, "the mistress'll be comin' soon and the banns —"

"Shaddle, be quiet." Supple ran upstairs and lighted up her young mistress's rooms.

And every night the neighbors saw the brilliancy in that half of the double house; all the more noticeable because every other window was dark. You see Peter's abode was quite around the corner.

A little later on, when Christmas was nigh, there arrived from the florist's a load of evergreens and boxes of poinsettias and wreaths of holly, and mistletoe tied with scarlet ribbons. And the young master said to the butler.

"Shaddle, I want you and Bridget to hang

What Peter Did

wreaths in the windows of Mrs. Van Zandt's rooms; and garlands around the chandeliers and pictures; and ropes of green over the doorways, and on Christmas Eve, to-morrow night, light all the candles on the mantel, and on your mistress's dressing-tables; and let them burn to the socket. And all the gas jets, too. And here's for your Christmas and Bridget's."

And all was done as he had directed. Betty's rooms were a bower of fragrance, and over the picture of the Madonna and the little Blessed Child, Bridget made bold to hang a blessed medal fraught with prayers to all her favorite Saints.

But the master did not come home that night.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN THE WEST CALLED TO THE EAST

IT was a quiet life that Betty led in Limoges: a wholly provincial life with far-off echoes of Paris and farther off echoes still of all the rest of the world. There were quaint families living in the old town near the stone bridge, families who were Royalist to the finger-tips; to whom the Corsican and his whole brood were anathema; stately personages of noble blood and lineage; ladies with wonderful graces and compliments; gentlemen of an almost exaggerated courtesy. Then there were the people of the city, the traders and exporters; the enamel makers; heads of the great potteries, manufacturers, dealers, and their wives and daughters and sons. There were the voyagers who came and went at the Consulate, but these Betty eschewed. What the months and years did with her in their detail of rising and setting of suns and moons, New Years, Christmases and the like, it is not the province of this record to state.

When the West Called

But even to Limoges there did come news one day of the great war that had broken out in the United States. Following fast on this there arrived one of Anny De Peyster's letters in which there was this paragraph. "Peter Van Zandt has volunteered for the army; his regiment has been ordered to the front."

Mrs. Van Zandt, as she read this, was sitting in the garden of her father's chateau in the upper town, the high wall, covered with vines, was ample protection from the passerby, and the tender shade of the poplars served to shield her from the sun. On a rustic table stood her breakfast tray, an equipage for two.

Betty was not alone. One was there with her.

As she sat with Anny's letter spread out before her she heard the tinkle of the fountain on the terrace, the cawing of the rooks in their nests, the click of the sabots on the pavement of the court where the servants were at work; and likewise Betty heard the voice of her companion.

She saw, too, all these people and things, felt the wonderful balm of the breeze perfumed by the flowers from the little beds around her; felt the unerring and complacent peacefulness of her environment; the superb self-sufficiency that exists

A Christmas Honeymoon

in some corners of the world, a self-sufficiency so complete that it has, in certain instances, the strange and subtle power of erasing the storms and stresses of those who come beneath its influences.

For twelve times twelve months Betty, radiant, irresponsible, laughing, dancing, willful Betty had lived on at Limoges. As has been set down it is no part of this simple narrative to tell what she went through during her sojourn in the France where she had once so longed to live.

But the outward quiet had been hers. The dull and perhaps deadly average had seemed to set its seal upon Colonel Revere's daughter.

Peter had never written. Peter's checks came every month and as regularly were filed away by his father-in-law, but never presented for payment; never once.

That morning the charm of the poplars, and the gardens, and the river below, with its lazing craft; the faint azure of the sky; the drone of the wind-mill; the hum of the bees in the fields of violets on the other side of her terrace; the distant song of a shepherd on the hills with his flocks; even the voice of the One who was her companion; all suddenly were blurred, blotted, stamped out of

When the West Called

sound, vision, and even remembrance by the over-power of Anny's news.

"Peter Van Zandt has volunteered for the army; his regiment has been ordered to the front."

She got up from her seat, threw her thimble, scissors, the garment she was making, to the table; walked to the little gate in the wall, opened it and stepped forth to the road.

Shading her eyes with her hand, she looked to the West.

Yes, to the West, where her husband was.

"Husband?" Well, yes, certainly.

And across from the West there seemed to Betty, out of the immeasurable blue, to stretch toward her soul, a yearning cry; it was not a sob, not an articulated coherence; a strange something that made to say, "Come," as nearly as she could define it herself.

Then, as her arms, her soul, her mind answered this, the gate behind her was pushed wider open, and the One who was her companion came through, and with tender words lured Betty back into the safety of the gardens, and into a semblance of the inertness of the days before Anny's letter had arrived.

Which lasted for a long, long time. It was

A Christmas Honeymoon

near the close of the war in America when another of Anny's letters came; to be sure, there had been scores between, but no mention of Peter Van Zandt in any one of these, until now Anny wrote: "Perhaps you will have seen by the papers, dear, if indeed they reach you, that Peter Van Zandt was taken prisoner by the rebels; he was in Libby for months, if not for a year, but has recently been exchanged, with health so impaired by the prison that a fever of some sort has set in and he lies in Washington City now in a hospital; whether in danger or not I don't find out."

It was winter when this letter of Anny's came; it was Christmas Eve, and the town was resounding with music and bells and jollity. Betty sat before the porcelain stove; the One who was with her sat very near on a velvet stool at her feet: outside the chateau could be heard the Christmas hymns, being sung in preparation by the serving-people.

It was intensely cold: the panes were covered with the exquisite tracery of the frost, even in the very teeth of the piled-up stoves at either end of the long salon.

But to Betty it was burning: her veins seemed filled with fire: the languid December sun slanted

When the West Called

in with its calm, yellow streaks on the polished floor. She threw down the embroidered band she was working on, and walked to the window at the West.

Ah, yes, the West. She opened the casements, both inner and outer, and the blast blew in scattering her reels and skeins over the floor. To be sure, her companion picked them up.

And again the West cried over to Betty's heart; and her heart answered; and nothing that the One could do or say could prevent her this time.

On Christmas day she left Limoges alone for Havre; for America; for New York. Twelve days later she landed, and in an hour more she was at the front door on the side street, of the old double house.

It had been a day of snow, gray, dark and melancholy; the street lamps were long since shining when Betty reached her home; and, glancing up, as she got out of the coach, she saw that every window of her old rooms was a-blaze.

Who was there? Had Peter been fetched home ill unto death? Or was he straight and well and able, and with his house full of guests for the holiday season?

While she had these flashing thoughts, the

A Christmas Honeymoon

coachman had rung the bell, and Shaddle had opened and beheld his mistress. Supple was behind her swain: Supple ran down the stoop and took Betty's reticule, the same reticule (the same trunks, one of them, too, was on the box), and Betty's long shawl, and gave her arm to her mistress quite as if her absence had been merely a matter of a few days.

"You see, madam, the master's orders were to keep your rooms always in readiness, and always lighted up every evening until morning; so all is quite as you would like, we hope," so said Bridget, while the butler stood tall and pompous dealing with the cabman as to the trunk.

When the coach had rolled away over the snow, Mrs. Van Zandt, who had paused in the hall, turned to Bridget and asked, "Is Mr. Van Zandt at home?"

"No, madam; Mr. Van Zandt has never been in this side of the house since you were called away, and he hasn't been in the other side for above three years now. Mr. Van Zandt is in hospital in the South somewheres. We don't know anything more than that." The tears were in Miss Supple's eyes.

Betty inclined her head. Then she went up

When the West Called

the stairs to her rooms. The Christmas greens were still fresh and pretty all about, for it had been Peter's order to dress her rooms with them every year, no matter where he might be, and this order the faithful pair had always carried out with reverent, wistful care.

Bridget went down. Shaddle beckoned to her from his pantry. "Biddy," he said, noting the tear traces in her eyes, "the young mistress has come back, and now the banns —"

"Shaddle!" Miss Supple's tone was that of one horror-struck by the other one's audacity, upon whom she placed an eye of fire. "The mistress is here, but where's our young master?"

And Shaddle, of course, beat a retreat. Shaddle seemed to himself to be always beating retreats before the object of his affections. Years made no odds for him. Bridget, obdurate as the unappeased gods, would listen to no nuptial overtures, and generally concluded these amatory colloquys by leaving the butler much of the opinion that he was an unnatural wretch to think of marrying under the conditions existing in his master's family.

Betty had been home for eight days before she let Anny De Peyster know of her arrival. In

A Christmas Honeymoon

those eight days there was no word gotten by her of Peter Van Zandt's well- or ill-fare.

It was just to wait and wait. Would he come? Was he dying? Had he forgotten her? Was there some other, fairer, sweeter woman whom his heart now rested in? Why not?

Then, when she sent Anny a note by Shaddle, Anny came at once.

She had news of Peter; of course Betty had it, too? No. Well, Ned Davies had gotten back from Washington the night before: he had seen Peter, if you please, none the worse for his Libby imprisonment; none the worse of his fever and hospital; quite splendidly well and usual, stopping at Willard's and asking Ned how soon he and Anny were going to be tied up.

Betty listened, said not a word and turned the talk wholly towards the patience of Ned Davies and the charms of life in a quaint French town like Limoges.

"And when do you go back, dear, or don't you go back at all?" Anny had asked gently of her friend.

"On Saturday," Betty replied. "And when you and Ned are married you must make the wedding journey over the sea to me, will you?"

When the West Called

Anny promised quizzically. She had been putting off that wedding of hers so long that it looked to her now like an agreeable *ignis fatuus*, or a delightful jest; although, to be sure, Ned Davies had always to be counted with, and sometimes he did allow himself a restiveness incompatible with Anny's holding out many more years.

So Mrs. Van Zandt sailed away again on the Saturday. She had left the house on the Square for the ship at noon; the sailing was scheduled for one o'clock. At nine that evening Mr. Van Zandt arrived from Washington.

Shaddle and Miss Supple had a conference in the kitchen, the result of which was that the butler, when he removed the dessert, and set out the cheese and celery, and refilled his master's glass, took covert occasion to slip beneath this last, a scrap of paper, carefully contrived by his own, and the dictating hand of Bridget. It ran this way: "Honored sir and master we dutifully enforme you that our mistress, Mrs. Van Zandt, returned home on the six of Jan. and sailed off this fifteenth day of same month, your respectfull and obedient servants Shaddle and Bridget."

Shaddle did not remain in the dining-room after he had placed the cheese, etc.; he, in fact, got away

A Christmas Honeymoon

to his pantry, down his little corkscrew back stairs, and into the kitchen, as quickly as he could, where Bridget awaited him. He sat bravely in her rocking chair, a liberty he seldom allowed himself, and swayed back and forth.

"What's the matter, Shad?" asked the serving-woman.

"The matter is," Shaddle spoke with an unwonted asperity, "that if the master only could have reached home before the mistress left, the banns —"

"Shaddle, I'm surprised at you. Hush."
Shaddle hushed.

CHAPTER VIII

BETTY'S CARTE DE VISITE

THAT night, or rather it was about two A. M., when all the little household slept, Mr. Van Zandt, who had made not even a feint of lying down, put on his raglan and hat, and went out into the street; merely to step up to the corner and around it; a few paces further to where the two big horse-chestnut trees were casting their gaunt winter shadows across the moonlit sidewalk: up the stoop of Mrs. Van Zandt's half of the house; the key he had never ceased to carry in his pocket, out, and fitted to the latch; the door pushed softly back and closed; the master within the precinct of the mistress.

He stood still; his glance going first to the archway and its curtains behind which he supposed the brick wall to have been built all those years ago. Then to the staircase; the clock ticking on; the niche with the statue of Ceres in it, the landing where she had stood.

A Christmas Honeymoon

She had been there. Not a dozen hours since, Betty, his wife, had come down where he was now going up, for Peter went up to the second floor, where the flood of radiance from the open doors of Mrs. Van Zandt's rooms greeted him.

He halted in the wide hall and leaned at her threshold. He did not enter. His eyes took in all the old, familiar, sweet things she had used; the chair that was her favorite, the vases from Nankeen that were her pleasure; the silver candlesticks on her dressing-table, the trinkets; the hand-mirrors; the pictures; the Christmas wreaths; the mahogany bedstead, with its tall carved head-board close to the door; its down quilt a little disturbed; a pillow to one side: something just projecting from under the pillow.

A card. Could Betty have left there another message? His hand shook as he reached in and drew the scrap from under the pillow; for Peter Van Zandt did not cross the sill of that room.

It was a little *carte de visite*, as the photographs of that day were called; and it was, yes! it was Betty: changed? not so much? older? not an hour? but most serene, her smiles just at the corners of her mouth, yes, Betty; and yet, no! not quite entirely; perhaps it was the style of

Betty's Carte de Visite

dress: seventeen years make differences in a woman's gown. This Betty wore a short skirt with some arrangement looping it on the hips called, he believed, panniers; and a sacque of fur with hanging sleeves; a cap of fur on top of her curly head.

Peter turned it over. To be sure; if he needed confirmation there it was in Betty's own hand writing, "Betty Van Zandt, Limoges, October 16th, 18—." Taken only about two months ago. He slipped it into his pocket, turned around, went down and went out, cautiously as a thief in the night, around into his own portion of the old house.

When Betty reached Limoges no one was at the station to meet her, because no one at the chateau knew that she was to arrive. When she got to the chateau, driving up in a sleigh in great jingling of bells and calls of the driver who rode the smallest of his lean beasts, the One was at the step to welcome her with such a wealth of warmth as made her coming back a joy. By-and-by, when these two were alone together in the long salon, for the Colonel had much business down in the city at the Consulate, of course, Betty was told a story.

A Christmas Honeymoon

By the One? Of course. A story as sweet, as tender, as full of happiness, hope, as had been the story Peter Van Zandt had told her more than seventeen years before.

And Betty listened?

Yes. She listened, and the comfort and pleasure of that which the One told her was inexpressibly grateful: not as had been the comfort of Peter's story, but as the later shadow of that first Eden.

Yes, Betty listened and was content.

While Betty, in Limoges, was listening to all the One had to tell her day in and day out, night in and night out, Peter Van Zandt was in India.

Two days only after his odd, stealthy visit to Mrs. Van Zandt's side of the double house, the master had left. There seemed a fatal kind of unrest on him: he could not stop in any land long. It was India; then China; Russia, down into France. Ah, yes, into France. In Paris he met some people he knew: a few men: one of them said, "You remember Ashleigh?"

"Yes, I do remember Ashleigh, the first secretary of the English Embassy years ago."

"Exactly. I ran against him here the other day; he asked for you."

Betty's Carte de Visite

"Did he? A comfortable British husband by this time, I suppose?"

"Not in the least. En route to Limoges, I think — yes, Limoges, to marry, he said, the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Who?" Peter's heart throbbed.

"Could one ask! My dear boy, when a chap talks like that, you know!" This man laughed: they shook hands and parted.

Peter went into a café, and surreptitiously took out the carte de visite of Betty, and looked at it. But Betty could not marry: of course not. What a fool he was! But she might: there might have been some sort of way by which she had freed herself. Ashleigh had wanted to marry Betty, he knew that.

He would go at once to Limoges.

No, he would do nothing of the kind. Instead, he went to South Africa, deep in the mines and digged, and sweated, and became grimy: and at eventide, frantic with the unspent forces that even the spade and the pickax and the shovel could not seem to exhaust, he would lie down under the stars and awake soaked with the damps; and let the sun make him dry; and rise up again to eat coarsely, drink deeply, and fall down again at

A Christmas Honeymoon

twilight like the beasts, all for the sake of a woman.

Then at the end of six years he got a better hold of himself, and washed and threshed his soul and put on the harnesses of civilization and got back to England. He stopped there a twelve-month and each thirty-one days found Peter Van Zandt more in the power of the memory of Betty, his wife, than the preceding thirty-one. He met Ashleigh and his wife, a charming French girl, and dined with them.

But the close of the seventh year fetched him back to the United States, to the old double house his father had so wisely built.

What was it that urged him?

A jealous rage, a fierce pang at his heart: the perhaps belated strangest phase of that which we call love: not the petty envying of any praise or worship she might have won from other men, but the insatiable desire to pit his worship against that of all the other men in the world, and so to win her over again. This was the goad that lashed Peter's soul and sent him home to America.

Mrs. Van Zandt had never returned.

The faithful servants were as they had been,

Betty's Carte de Visite

quite as if only yesterday the young master had gone away.

And over in Limoges? The chateau was for rent: there had to be a new Consul-General. While the shepherd sang on the hillsides a song of the early autumn, while the lily fields were still white and the poplars whispered to the wind; while the evergreen's dream was of Christmas, and while the sabots clicked on the paths; when the harvest was being gathered and when the grapes were in the press, Betty, with strange, difficult new stirrings in her woman's heart, drew all that belonged to her about her, and set sail again from France for New York.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT PETER SAW PASSING HIS DOOR

“**B**IDDY,” Shaddle said the day after Mrs. Van Zandt came back, “what shall we do?”

Miss Supple shook her head.

“We must let the master know, Biddy, mustn’t we?”

“We’ll write him the same as we did before, Shad, and say that Mrs. Van Zandt is back.”

“Yes, but — ?” the butler cast a dubious eye upon his betrothed.

“Leave the buts out of it altogether, Shad. Don’t say nothin’; don’t write nothin’ except what we did the first time.”

“All right, Bridget, you know best.”

“Let him find it all out for himself,” Bridget added, as she adjusted her Turkey red dusting-cap. “Ah, it’s glad I am this day, I wheedled the boss-builder into not puttin’ up the wall on the parlor floor.”

What Peter Saw

Shaddle regarded Miss Supple with that veneration which is always becoming in his sex, and proceeded out to sweep his sidewalk.

The note, a counterpart of its predecessor, was written and cautiously placed beneath the finger-bowl doily this time, when the master was about to finish his dinner. He saw and read it.

He did not finish his dinner. He rose from the table, took his coat and hat and went out. Around the corner on the opposite side of the street; from there he could see the lights in her windows, see even her shadow as she crossed.

Well, it was — he was evenly balanced enough to admit to himself — a magnificent thing to have lived to feel as he did. At forty-seven, Peter felt as he never had before. What he had experienced at twenty-one was a child's play in comparison.

She was up there: one roof would cover them both that night. Was it not a splendor to know so much? She had not sought to marry another man. His name was her name. She had come home. The knowledge thrilled to his soul and the rapture of it raised him to those seventh heavens which are erroneously supposed to be reserved for the young in years.

A Christmas Honeymoon

Which is quite an untruth: for they are untraveled roads to the young in years, and only he who has lived a while on, has ever become at all intimate with the gardens of the gods through which these paths pass.

By-and-by Peter went over to the Union League Club; by-and-by again, he came home, by way of her windows, assuredly.

Days afterward, Mr. Van Zandt was standing on his stoop buttoning his gloves, about to go down town, when he saw a little boy just passing his area gate, a little boy with the bluest eyes, and the softest dark curls and the straightest little legs in velvet leggings; he carried a violin-case, and very likely that, and a certain air of distinction and courage about the boy, caused Mr. Van Zandt to touch his hat and speak.

"Good morning, little man."

"Good morning, Monsieur," the velvet cap was entirely off the curly head with a bow of mingled courtesy and aloofness: the salute of one gentle person to another when both are strangers.

"On the way to school, I suppose?" Mr. Van Zandt was by this down the stoop and on the sidewalk.

What Peter Saw

"No, Monsieur, on the way to take my violin lesson."

"Aha, I see; you don't go to school?" They were already taking steps together toward the Parade Ground.

"No, Monsieur. Grandmamma says I shall not go to the school until another year."

"You are a French boy, sir?"

"Yes, Monsieur," looking up with wide inquisitive eyes, "but I am to be an American man."

"Indeed, how is that?"

"I will learn to be one here; Grandmamma says so."

"I hope you may. Now, do you turn here?"

"Yes, Monsieur. I cross the Park and go on to the Cottage Place, No. 12. Signor Prati lives there: he is the teacher of my violin."

Peter lingered; why, he did not know. The boy loitered; the reason for it he, of course, did not seek. Then Peter said: "Do you pass this way every day, sir?"

"No, Monsieur; all the every other day."

"And you love the violin, of course?"

The child's small shoulders raised themselves quite expressively. "It was with me, Monsieur, the piano; but Grandmamma!"—again the little

A Christmas Honeymoon

shoulders went up — “would not have it so. It must, for her be the violin, always the violin; so I study it carefully, but I do not like the noise sometimes.”

“But to please your Grandmamma, eh?” Mr. Van Zandt was frankly interested now in this child. Children had not appealed to him: in fact, they had hardly been observed factors in the life he had so far led, and the fresh, naïve expression of this one charmed and amused him, at any rate for the moment.

“Ah, Monsieur, yes, to please Grandmamma I would do whatever it was.” He raised his cap, and glancing at the clock, hurried away.

Peter had an image of the boy, and of the boy's grandmother in his mind. Some stately, white-haired old lady in a stiff, sage-green brocade, with a cape and fringes; a snowy lace kerchief crossed on her breast, a cap with lilac ribbons, and a reticule full of smelling-salts and spectacles: quite a grande dame and from France, of course. This was Peter's mental portrait of this little boy's grandmother.

Then Peter got into an omnibus and rode down to Nassau Street, for he had lately resumed his law practice.

What Peter Saw

The following morning, by an instinct or impulse which he did not recognize with sufficient definiteness to analyze, Mr. Van Zandt found himself, as he left for his office, glancing up and down the street for a glimpse of that little boy. He did not see him: the little boy did not go for violin lessons every day; to be sure not. When Mr. Van Zandt came home about five o'clock, he also looked for that little boy, but did not see him. He had a mind to go around the corner and get just a glimpse of Mrs. Van Zandt's windows, of Mrs. Van Zandt's shadow: but no, he went into his house with something rather like a sigh. Peter lived in the front of his house; he had never in all these years gone to the rear where he might have looked out upon the garden. The garden, he argued, was Betty's; and not even his eyes should pry upon the paths, the shade, the flowers or the vines in summer; on the broad, unflecked reaches of the snow, the frozen pool of the fountain, in winter: he would deny himself even one glance over the high wall which he had built giving to her the most part of the ground.

He was thinking along these lines, when the vision of that little boy with the violin entered in

A Christmas Honeymoon

and took quiet possession of his mind. That little boy seemed to him, in his fantasy, to be standing near Betty: ah, to be sure, that was because the little French lad's eyes were blue, and his curls dark, his cheeks bursting in bloom of rose, his lips coral: of course; what odd fancies a man can have!

But again the next day, and the next, Peter Van Zandt searched the street for the little boy. At last he espied him, running as fast as his small legs could tear, but coming to a sudden halt, cap off, as he beheld Peter Van Zandt.

"Good morning, Monsieur," he was quite breathless.

"Good morning, sir; you are in a hurry; you are late?"

"No, Monsieur, I am early, but I am running away so that Straduarius can't follow me."

"Indeed; Straduarius is a playmate of yours, I take it? another little boy?"

"No, Monsieur, I find no boys here yet to play with. Grandmamma says by-and-by it will be different, but now my playmate is Grandmamma, and also the pussy cats."

"Is Straduarius a pussy cat?" Peter inquired, wishing ardently to know, to commune

What Peter Saw

with this child, and feeling awkward and ill-at-ease with the perfect novelty of his situation.

"Yes, Monsieur: there is also, Ole Bull, and Paganini."

"Very nice, I am sure. May I walk along with you, sir, to Signor Prati's?"

"Yes, Monsieur, if you will. They have these names because, Grandmamma says, their singing — at night, you know, in the garden — is much like the way my violin cries when I punish it with my bad playing."

"I see!" Mr. Van Zandt found the little French boy adorable and entertaining both. "And your Grandmamma is your playmate? For an old lady that is remarkable, sir."

"Oh, Monsieur!" The lad's round eyes opened to their widest. "Grandmamma is not old, not at all," he laughed a little. "Oh, but no! you should see her play with Paganini: figure to yourself, Monsieur, she runs for him with a ball and string quite like I do!"

"Is it possible?" Mr. Van Zandt's imagination took shape with the old lady in the brocade and kerchief tripping somewhat stiffly for the edification of the pussy-cat and the boy.

"And what is your name, sir, may I ask?"

A Christmas Honeymoon

The child looked at the man askance, with the unconscious appraisal of childhood; then he answered frankly. "Pierre de la Quéréau, Monsieur."

"Pierre," repeated Mr. Van Zandt with a smile.

"Yes, Monsieur; for the English, it is Peter. Grandmamma calls me Peter sometimes. Monsieur my father was the Marquis de la Quéréau, but Grandmamma says there are no Marquises here."

"And your father?—" Why did Peter Van Zandt question this stranger lad? No matter, he did.

The child raised his cap from his head and stood still. "Is gone, Monsieur, to look for my mamma." His bonny eyes were gazing up, up into the clear blue of the November sky.

Mr. Van Zandt took off his own hat, and for a moment the two stood bareheaded, silent, in the leaf-strewn walk of the old Parade Ground.

"You and Madame, your Grandmamma, then, are all alone, sir?"

"Yes, Monsieur, except the cats."

"Except the cats. Would you like me to call you by your title? for the title is yours, sir, in this country as well as in France."

"No, Monsieur." He shook his head vehe-

What Peter Saw

mently, and Mr. Van Zandt's face expressed the query which his lips did not frame. The lad felt this: he was, to be sure, but a young lad, only seven or so, but perhaps precocious from always having lived with grown up people.

"It is like this, Monsieur. There is Grandpapa," he spoke softly, tenderly.

"Ah, you have also your Grandpapa; that is good."

The little boy shook his head as vigorously as before. "But, no, Monsieur, we have him not. He was an American gentleman, both of him: one of him is also gone away." Again the child looked up; again both man and boy bared their heads for a moment's silence. "The other one I have not seen; he was an American also; Grandmamma has his picture, I think," he spoke with a doubtful emphasis, "in a gold frame 'round her neck. I don't know. But I am to be as they were, Monsieur, an American." He took a long breath, resting after the many words his unaccustomed lips had spoken. Childhood is staccato, and he was tired with the continuity.

"I see, sir. This is Cottage Place, do we turn in here?"

"Yes, Monsieur; Signor Prati will be in the

A Christmas Honeymoon

little balcony waiting. Hark! you can hear him playing on his violin; so; that is very beautiful when one is the master of it; but I! The violin is the master of me!"

"It is a difficult instrument," Mr. Van Zandt was almost accompanying the child to the gate of No. 12.

"Monsieur! if you do not make it your slave, it shrieks and howls and makes crazy everybody near it."

Peter regarded the boy. He was a strange boy, he thought; but perhaps all children were odd; Peter did not know.

"Will Monsieur then enter, and see Signor Prati?" His small hand was on the latch.

"No, sir, no, I thank you. I must be getting down to my office."

The same thought was in the mind of each. Why did not "Monsieur" tell his name to the child? Van Zandt felt keenly his own breach of etiquette, but not as keenly as the boy felt it. There was even an expectant, hesitant pause at the wicket, then the man put out his hand and said, "I hope to meet you soon again, sir." Forty-seven has innumerable reservations.

And the lad said, disappointed but gallant:

"Good morning, Monsieur. I thank you."

CHAPTER X

WHERE LITTLE PETER FOUND THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

“**B**UT, Grandmamma, I am sure this is a fine, true gentleman.”

“Why? What makes you think so, Peter?”

“Because he calls me ‘sir’; and he is the only gentleman here who says ‘sir’ to me.”

“It is not the custom, dear,”

“But this gentleman makes the custom for himself. Ah, Grandmamma, I am so sorry I displease you, but it is a gentleman I like to hear talk.”

“I know, dear, but Grandmamma has told you, don’t you know? Not to speak to strangers, not to answer when strangers speak to you in the streets. It is different here from in Limoges. New York is a great city and people don’t know one another as they do in France. Won’t you try and remember next time any stranger speaks to you? or shall I have Shaddle go with you to

A Christmas Honeymoon

Signor Prati's." Mrs. Van Zandt as she spoke laid her hand on little Peter's head.

"No, Grandmamma. I am to be an American. I can obey. I wish not for Shaddle. I know the way to Cottage Place entirely. I would be ashamed now to have Shaddle. I will go around by the next street."

"No, dear, don't do that: my boy must learn to behave with grace and dignity. You must go the same way you have been going, but show by your manner, when you meet this gentleman, that you can't stop to talk with him."

"That," said the little boy, "will be as hard as making my violin speak pleasantly."

"Is he an old gentleman, Pierre?" Betty asked.

The child regarded her thoughtfully. "I don't know, Grandmamma."

"Is his hair white, dear?"

Peter nodded. "Yes, his hair is white, but the moustache, that is black."

"Where does he live, did you say?"

"Around the corner, only."

Mrs. Van Zandt shook her head. "I don't know any of my neighbors, dear, not even their names. Grandmamma would rather you did not talk with any stranger."

Where Peter Found the Key

There was a long silence between them, while Straduarus, Ole Bull and Paganini purred on the hearth. Finally the child asked, in a curious, defiant way, "Grandmamma, why?"

Betty was startled. She had wandered far away from her surroundings, and was for the moment puzzled for an adequate reply; therefore she said:

"Dear, Grandmamma can't always explain to her little boy."

There was another pause. Then little Peter said, "It is true that Christmas is coming soon, is it not, Grandmamma?"

"Yes, indeed," Betty sighed.

"I remember last Christmas," the boy exclaimed.

"Yes, of course you do."

"And the large storm, and the beggar-man at the window of the salon, his feet in the snow without even sabots."

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Van Zandt was well pleased at the child's remembering.

"We took him in by the stove, and Marie and Ursule brought soup and bread, and socks and a coat; and I gave all my two francs and twenty centimes, and you, too."

"To be sure we did, gladly, dear."

A Christmas Honeymoon

The lad fixed his eyes upon Betty's face as he whispered gently, "He was a stranger."

She turned her head away: she rose and went to the window. Peter Van Zandt saw her shadow as he passed; saw her hand go up to her eyes.

"You said I must always entertain the strangers: they were sometimes angels, and even if they were not, still I must entertain them," little Peter went on.

Betty came back to her grandson. Knelt down on the rug near him and the cats. "Yes, dear, I know —"

"Grandmamma, I could make you cry with much pleasure if you say to me one thing last Christmas, another thing this Christmas time, about the strangers, I could!" His dark eyes flashed just as Betty had seen Peter Van Zandt's eyes flash long ago, and his lad's voice was tense, fierce.

She took his little rebellious hands in hers. "Dear, by-and-by you will comprehend, there are wicked men who do harm to little children; they are strangers sometimes: one has to be on their guard."

"He who calls me 'monsieur' is not wicked, Grandmamma, I am sure. Ah!" his small arms

Where Peter Found the Key

went around her neck, caressingly, his face hot, against her. "Please, Grandmamma, do not forbid that I speak with this stranger this year, please? He is noble like — well — like you!"

"Very well, then, you may; but promise me, dear, on the word of a gentleman, you will not go anywhere with him, eh?"

The boy raised his right hand: "Foi de la Quéreau, Grandmamma, never."

Betty kissed him, and drew him closer.

Presently he asked, "Shall we have a Christmas tree, Grandmamma? Do they have one here?"

Betty sighed. "Yes, Pierre, they have Christmas trees here, of course, but we will not have one this year. We are not happy enough yet."

"Will we be happy?"

"Maybe."

"Is Christmas a sad time here, Grandmamma?"

"Sometimes, dear, but we, you and I and the pussy-cats, we will make it glad. We'll try to. Straduaris and Ole Bull and Paganini shall have new collars and saucers of cream and fish," whereupon the child began to gambol with his pets and

A Christmas Honeymoon

presently they, and he after them, had galloped up the steep stairs to the garret.

While Betty sat by the fire and struggled with herself. Had she not fallen upon her knees? Had she not humbled her soul? Was she not living in Peter's house!

Did not the little boy bear Peter's unliked name? Had she not nailed her antipathies to the cross of remorse? Were not her nerves racked each day by the tortures of the violin she had elected that Peter's namesake should learn to play upon? Had she not named the very cats in remembrance of the fiddle masters of the world? Then Betty, laughing Betty, smiled as she heard the child's feet and the pussy cats' feet scampering in their play over her head.

She was the same Betty that she had been years and years ago, full of little, whimsical conceits; child and woman both, in one. By-and-by the pattering footsteps died away, and the log burned down on her hearth, and the snow blew and flew and beat at her panes; the early twilight crept on, and Betty alone there heard nothing but the ticking of the tall clock out on the landing.

Would Peter ever knock at the door of her side of the old house?

Where Peter Found the Key

'As she knelt that was the cry of her bitterness. She felt the Christmastide coming; people were counting up the days to it, already; the little lad was wishful over it. Ah, would the blessed day of all birthdays fetch to her the gift she craved?

While Betty knelt alone there, above little Peter was having a very fine time, indeed, inducing the cats to the most lively games of hide-and-seek, over and under, and in and out, of all the odd dark corners a garret alone can afford.

Ole Bull had separated himself from his friends; he had discovered a bit of string hanging from some keys on a wooden peg, just enough in reach of his claws to set the keys jingling and the string flying, whetting his joy more and more.

Little Peter, attracted, of course, came over to look at the keys: he had looked at so many things already and he had put on a pair of Hessian boots with spurs, in which his small legs were swimming; and a soldier cap of Peter Van Zandt's which covered his ears like a basket, and he was brandishing a rusty gun over Paganini and Strad-uarius, when Supple, it being Thursday and her day for what she called "redding up the garret," beheld him, as she mounted the steep stairs, her head popping through the well-hole just as the

A Christmas Honeymoon

little boy was carefully attempting to fit one of the keys to the door of the pantry under the eaves.

Miss Bridget Supple's eyes danced; she paused, leaning on her broom-handle and actually seemed to feast upon the grotesque little figure in the army boots and cap, its busy fingers at the key and lock.

"That don't fit in there, Master Peter," said the serving-woman.

"No? but where, then, Brigitte, eh?"

"Nobody knows but me, sir."

"But you will tell, yes?"

"Maybe so." Miss Supple sat upon the top step while the three pussy cats collected around her, purring and arching their backs; they knew who fed them very well, indeed. "Will you promise not to tell any livin' soul, sir, if I tell you?"

"Grandmamma?" little Peter said tentatively and in mild reproof.

Supple shook her head, which was crowned by a most remarkable turkey-red sweeping cap, decked with a bow of great size that nodded with her every movement.

"Not madame my grandmamma?"

Where Peter Found the Key

Supple still shook her head. "Not yet, Master Peter, by and by."

"Oh, very well. Now tell me."

"Sure, sir, why do you want to know that?"

Miss Supple was adjusting sundry matters in her mind, and was taking time.

"Because," the little boy said, choosing words as he had to do, since he had been brought up in a foreign country, "because, Brigitte, I am like a King of France: that one who was also the locksmith, you know?"

Miss Supple nodded. She didn't know, but what did that matter. "That King loved to fit the keys. So do I—much better than the violin. Now, where shall I go to fit the big one?"

Miss Supple rose. While the boy had been speaking she had communed with her saints and, to her simple soul, they had seemed to speak. Bridget said, "Come on, sir"; and together the middle-aged woman in her turkey-red coronet, the little boy in his Hessian boots and army cap, followed by the three pussy cats, descended the garret stairs, then the lower flight, cautiously, tiptoe, Supple with her finger on her lips, as they passed the Mistress's door. Down to the wide hall, and across to the big archway. Supple drew aside the

A Christmas Honeymoon

heavy curtains and disclosed the large mahogany door. She pointed to the keyhole and the bow on the turkey-red wagged expressively.

"It's there that one fits, Master Peter," Bridget whispered.

"Shall I, then, fit it and turn it?" the little boy whispered back, the army cap of Peter Van Zandt dropping into his eyes and over his round red cheeks.

Paganini at this juncture mewed.

Miss Supple exclaimed, still under her breath: "Whisht! No, sir, not now: not now."

"But when?" The child looked earnestly at her, waiting, the big key in his hand ready.

"But when!" Yes, that was the question Supple could not answer: and the sparkling, expectant, excited childish eyes waited on her reply.

"Well, Master Peter, it's your own Bridget has led you here to the sill of it, but it's your own self, sir, must say when you'll fit the key to that lock."

The child, confronted with his first draught of real responsibility, drew back; then, in manly fashion started forward to fit the key then and there.

Bridget held his arm. "Not now, Master Peter, not now." Supple was terrified at her own audacity.

Where Peter Found the Key

Little Peter thus withheld, said, "But, Brigitte, what is on the other side of this door?"

Bridget Supple, brought face to face with a concise problem, clapped a hand to the turkey-red for assistance. To be sure, Supple had an excellent intelligence stowed away back of the turkey-red somewhere.

After a slight pause: "Sure, Master Peter, I don't exactly know, but I'm thinkin' it's happiness, sir, that's lyin' on the other side of that door."

"Do you!" cried the child excitedly. "Happiness for Grandmamma also?"

"Sure, I do."

"Brigitte," the little boy drew near to her, holding the key tight, "do you fancy I should unlock that door and find the happiness for Madame Grandmamma, before Christmas, eh?"

"I do, sir; that same, before Christmas. Some evenin', Master Peter, when madam is readin' or writin' above; or when she's gone up to Bloomin'dale to visit Miss De Peyster."

"Brigitte, I will! You will see! I will, foi de la Quéreau! Unlock and find the happiness for Grandmamma." He put the key in his jacket pocket and Bridget went into the pantry to confer a bit with Shaddle.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT PETER VAN ZANDT SAW IN THE PARADE GROUND

NOT very many days after the little boy had found the key to happiness hanging on the wooden peg in the garret, he was playing snow balls in the park, while his grandmother sat on one of the benches and watched him. It was not too cold for this; one of the crisp, mellow days, with sunshine through a yellow veil of mist from the two rivers, and not a breeze to stir the leaves beneath one's tread. Betty was facing the North side; looking up, she could see the house she was born in, with its brick and marble front, and its small square panes, pink with the curious color touch of time. Little Peter came bounding up to her.

"Grandmamma, your letter! We have not posted it, and Ursule and Marie will be thinking you forget them if it doesn't get to Limoges by Christmas. Shall I take it to the box, yes?"

On the Parade Ground

"To be sure! I did forget it! And, Pierre, you had better take it over to the Broadway box, dear, you know? the one on the corner by Grace Church; it will go more quickly, perhaps, from there."

"I will. I will run all the way, for Ursule and Marie to have their Christmas letter."

"No, don't run. I will wait; or if I don't, I will go straight home. If you want to play here a while longer, you may."

"Yes, yes!" The child ran off and posted the letter. As he turned from the box he paused a moment and stared at the church, took a few steps toward the iron railing and peered through. The path looked pleasant to Pierre de la Quéreau. It was possibly because it was in a sense forbidden.

His hand was on the gate-latch and he was bound in, when someone said, "Good morning, sir!"

The little boy turned to see his new friend waiting for the stage-sleigh to come along and take him down town.

"Good morning, Monsieur. I was just going into this church, but I will not."

"Do you want to go in?" asked the man in some astonishment, for the desire was clearly in

A Christmas Honeymoon

the child's renunciation. Little Peter inclined his head.

"Why, may I ask?"

"Because Grandmamma will not. We go always to St. Clement's in Amity Street, you know? This is a large, splendid church. I wish to see it. It is like France."

"Go in, by all means, then," Mr. Van Zandt opened the gate himself.

"I am not sure," the little boy hesitated. "Grandmamma says my grandpapa, one of them, goes there, and he would not wish to see us there?"

Van Zandt stood still a second. Then, for even this little child there was already the strife, the unhappiness of some family discord.

"But," he responded, "your grandpapa will not be here on a Wednesday."

"No?"

"Then go in and see it, and go home and tell your grandmother, eh, how will that do?" he smiled down into the troubled face.

Pierre put out a small mittened hand to his friend and said, "With you, I go in."

But Mr. Van Zandt, imperceptibly, perhaps, started back: then looking into the upturned face

On the Parade Ground

so full of trust, he relaxed and answered, "You see, sir, I have not been inside of a church in over twenty-six years."

The little boy stared and ejaculated, "But, come, Monsieur, yes?"

The man was still reluctant, although they were together going up the path. A moment more and they were ascending the steps, little Peter tugging with all his might at the door, looked over his small shoulder and said, "Please help me, Monsieur."

And "Monsieur" helped him.

They went in, and hand-in-hand they walked up the aisle that Peter had walked down with his bride on his arm so long, so long ago.

"It should be to kneel down, Monsieur, yes?"

Peter Van Zandt knelt down beside the little boy. Presently they rose and came out together.

"You see, your Grandpapa was not there, eh, Monsieur le Marquis?" Van Zandt laughed.

"No, Monsieur. Look! Look! Already the Christmas trees are for sale!" The child ran down and through the gate to the street. At the corner a vender was hawking a wagonfull of evergreen and firs: little Peter clapped his hands for joy; he had now forgotten his grandfather

A Christmas Honeymoon

and the church, immersed in the first signs he had seen in this new country of the customs and mirth of the one where he was born.

"You are to have a Christmas tree, I suppose?"

"But, no, Monsieur. Not this year. Grandmamma thinks Christmas is very sad." He glanced up into the strong and tender face of the man beside him. "Do you think that way, too, Monsieur?"

"Yes, sir, I am afraid I do." His lips were set.

Little Peter stared up wonderingly. "That is strange, you and Grandmamma both." Then the little boy suddenly remembered the key to happiness and also recalled that he must hurry away.

"Good-by, Monsieur, I must go back to the Parade Ground. Grandmamma waits for me."

"I'll go with you." In some vague fashion Peter clung to the skirts of this little boy. They walked briskly back to the Parade Ground. Little Peter surveyed the scene.

"Grandmamma is not here; she did not wait. I have been too long! Good-by, Monsieur, I must hurry. I ask your pardon. I promised."

The child ran away, catching a slide as he went on a frozen pool, his curls flying; and, to be sure,

On the Parade Ground

that key to happiness jingling in his pocket, with his top and knife and pennies.

Peter Van Zandt watched him quite out of sight. Had he wished, indeed, to meet the grandmother of his little new friend? Had that been why he had come back with this boy? No, no. It was charming to encounter this charming and original child, but his grandmother! The old lady in the stiff brocade with the reticule full of spectacles and knitting needles and lozenges; no.

Then, as he decided to cross the Park quite to the West side and take a car down as far as Vesey Street, Peter Van Zandt, as he went, saw a figure in brown sitting on a bench near the wooden paling at the North End. A lady in a russet gown and boots, a large mink cape with cuffs and small muff to match: on her brown hair a cap of the same fur, brown gloves, too. She rose, he saw that her figure was slim and graceful: she turned her face his way, although she could not see him for the tree that had prevented little Peter from seeing her.

It was his wife, Betty Van Zandt. Betty as of old, resplendent in the rich bursting bloom of her cheeks and lips, the softness and dazzle of her blue eyes, the curve of her chin, the slope of her

A Christmas Honeymoon

shoulders, the long supple line of her, from throat to heel. Peter stood perfectly still for a second, then started toward her: then shrank away. Betty had left him. Could he intrude or force himself upon her? Take advantage of the open freedom of the streets to address or approach her?

By no means.

He stood afar watching her as she apparently watched or waited for someone else. For whom? Suddenly, with startling accuracy, Van Zandt recalled Ashleigh. Pshaw! Ashleigh was safely married. Someone else, then, for whom Betty watched; with whom she was going to walk and talk. The keen steel of jealousy struck to his heart. She was, though, after all of it, his wife; and his eyes flashed as the little boy's had flashed when his grandmother had cautioned him as to strangers.

Betty was beautiful, more radiant, vibrant with life and vividness than ever; the lines, if there were any in her face, were the little lines of laughter; and her glorious eyes looked forth into the world with all the glad expectancy of youth. Could a man expect a woman like that not to be

On the Parade Ground

loved, not to love? Absurd. She was made for love. He turned on his heel and left the Park. A hand-organ was droning out: "When this cruel war is over," at the corner, and all the ballads stuck between the palings, fluttered in the breeze. He paused there, and looked at them vacantly. "Annie Laurie," "Ben Bolt," and the rest. Then he glanced back to his own house; he saw smoke coming from the chimneys; he saw the pigeons wheeling above the stable in the rear of the garden. The stable? To be sure, the stalls were empty. Poppet and Peacock, the roans that had fetched Betty and him back from Grace Church to the St. Nicholas on their wedding day, had, years since, been sent to a farm on Long Island.

Peter Van Zandt, keeping himself well in hand, keeping his face averted from her, made another turn, went back to Broadway and walked all the way down to Tattersall's.

A few days after that the little boy came rushing, tumbling in from the garden up to Betty's room.

"Grandmamma! Grandmamma! There are horses in the stable! Two speckled, and a coach-

A Christmas Honeymoon

man, and they are in the stalls and their names are Poppet and Peacock, just as the names of the old horses you have tell me about!"

Betty looked up from her crochê work. "Pierre!" she exclaimed. "You must be mistaken."

"But, no, Grandmamma, I am not. And they are your horses. The groom told me so; and it is the surprise you make for me, is it?"

"No, no, no," Betty cried out impetuously. "No, dear, it is only that the owner of the stable has probably rented it to someone to whom these new horses belong."

"Grandmamma," the little boy spoke with some impatience, "I tell you the groom says they are your new horses, and, there! I hear prancing on the snow before the house!" He darted to the window. "See!" Rushing back to drag his grandmother with him. "Look! There they are. Look. Look!"

"I see." She saw the coupé put into thorough order, its white linings renewed, and a pair of strawberry roans champing their bits and gayly dancing in the snow before her door.

"Magnificent!" cried the child. "Yours, Grandmamma! Perhaps Santa Claus sends them

On the Parade Ground

early because he will be so busy with so many chimneys?"

Betty shook her head and drew away.

"Is it that we will go out in it now?" the child pressed her eagerly. "I am sure the coachman expects it, for he put the warm soapstones in for your feet; yes?"

"No, dear; it is a mistake."

She went back to her chair and her wool work.

Yes, that was it; a mistake. Did Peter Van Zandt think that she was craving his horses and his carriage? Did he think that she would accept gifts now? It was true that she had come back to his house: that was because of the little lad, of course. The little lad whom she could not find it in her soul as yet to reveal to him.

Solely the little lad?

Then Betty's crochê needle dropped and something briny, bitter, fell upon the afghan she was making for little Peter's bed.

If Peter Van Zandt could not, did not want to knock at the door of her half of the old house, she could not ride in Peter Van Zandt's coupé.

"Then it is not for us to get in and promenade to Central Park or Fifth Avenue, eh, Grand-mamma?" The child spoke with resignation.

A Christmas Honeymoon

"No, dear; no, no. It is a mistake. Grandmamma knows. You will enjoy riding on your hobbyhorse up in the garret, I am sure, just as much as in the coupé."

Little Peter shook his head. "But you, Grandmamma, you have no hobbyhorse; what will you do?"

"Just as before."

"When you go 'way up to Bloomingdale to Miss 'Anny's," he sighed over the lost joys of real horses as to be preferred to wooden ones.

Betty laughed. "I will ride in the horse car to Thirty-second Street, and there the stage waits to take me to Bloomingdale, you remember?"

Peter the little, nodded. "Yes, Madame Grandmamma, a very pale, miserable stage, with the horses thin and smoking in the sunshine, without blankets; I remember." Pierre de la Quéreau had gone back to the window by this time and his brilliant little face was pressed against the pane.

"Grandmamma, what is a mistake?" he at last cried out petulantly, even angrily, his small fist clenched ready to fight mistakes, whatever they might be.

"Something wrong that someone has done: that is always a mistake."

On the Parade Ground

"Who, then, did something wrong?" he asked interestedly coming to her side.

"I did."

"You, Madame Grandmère!" His large, incredulous eyes were fixed upon Betty's face. Then he saw the shine of tears and his little arms went about her in coaxing fondness. He forgot the strawberry roans and the coupé: presently, too, he felt the key of happiness jingling in his pocket, and he said:

"Never mind, Grandmamma, I know something!" with importance. "Something excellent and very extensive."

She smiled "And what is that, dear?"

"By-and-by you shall know. Not yet: it will come, I know."

"I will wait."

"It is not comfortable to wait," remarked the little boy, balancing it in his mind whether to tell his Grandmother or not about the key to happiness: then he recollected that his promise had been given to Miss Supple not to tell, and he moved uneasily on his ottoman until Betty answered. "After one has waited twenty-six years, it is not so hard, dear."

"Oh!" Little Peter rolled this over and over

A Christmas Honeymoon

in his thoughts until finally he concluded that he would not wait any longer to fit the key. Christmas must be near by: it was to be "before Christmas" that he was to fit the key. When was Christmas?

"Grandmamma, when will be the Christmas?"

"In three days, dear."

And he had agreed with Supple that it was to be fitted when Madame Grandmamma should be very busy with her books and pens, or else when she had gone up to Bloomingdale.

"Grandmamma, when will you go to Bloomingdale?"

"I'm going up there on Christmas Eve, dear, just for a little while to have dinner with Miss Anny and Mr. Davies and afterwards to St. Michael's Church."

The little boy's face fell.

Betty saw it and misdivined the cause. "Grandmamma is not going to take you up there with her because there are no little boys and girls to play with. On that night you are to go to the Ogden's for a merry time."

Little Peter now forgot the key to happiness completely. "Will Miss Polly Manierre be there, Grandmamma?"

On the Parade Ground

"I expect so. She is going to marry Mr. Lawrence Ogden, you know."

"Then I will not go!" the little boy stamped his copper-toed shoe vehemently.

"But, Pierre, why not?"

"Because, Grandmamma, if — if I were Cain and Mr. Lawrence Ogden, Abel, I would kill him."

"Peter Van Zandt de la Quéreau!"

"Yes, Madame Grandmère, I would."

"You must not say or think such things; why do you?"

"Because," the child almost suffocated with his emotions, "Miss Polly is which I love and have promised to marry me, and it is wicked for Mr. Lawrence to steal her from me!" As usual, when deeply moved, the child's use of his second language was perturbed.

"But, Pierre, dear child, Miss Polly was only in fun. Don't you know, you are a little boy and not to marry anyone for years and years?"

"In fun?" the child repeated wonderingly, and the woman inclined her head.

"How many years?" he asked solemnly.

"Twenty-five or thirty."

"So many?"

A Christmas Honeymoon

"Yes: boys do not get to be whole men until that long."

"Oh!" He thrust his now relaxed fist deep in his pocket. To be sure, the key of happiness was lying there, warm and safe." But, Grandmamma, all the same, I will not go to the Ogdens'. I will stop here with the pussy cats and Brigitte and the butler."

"Very well, dear." Betty was wise with him and always let him guide himself when she could. "I am going to the Ogdens' for dinner this evening. Will you mind? It is the first time Grandmamma has dined out since we came to America."

Little Peter said "no," placidly, then with an accession of joy he began to hop about the room, to clap his hands, to pull the ears of Paganini, and to sing with delight. He remembered that he could fit the key while his grandmother was away, and that when she got home, he would have happiness ready to bestow upon her.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN THE LITTLE MASTER UNLOCKED "THE DOOR BETWEEN"

THE little boy was watchful all the rest of the day: he skipped about while Betty was making her toilette, asking questions, finally quite exhausting both himself and his grandmother, who had never seen the child so uneasy and anxious before.

"Grandmamma, is it this muff you will carry?"

"Yes, Pierre, but I am not ready for the muff yet. I haven't on my cape or cuffs."

"What time is the dinner, Grandmamma?"

"Six o'clock, dear."

"And how long does it take for you to reach Bloomingdale?"

"About two hours."

"Oh, Grandmamma, the clock says now half-after-three. You should hurry, yes?"

"Pierre, are you in a hurry for me to leave you?" Again she laughed.

A Christmas Honeymoon

The little boy hung his head; presently lifted it and nodded slowly.

"Why?" Betty had not before seen this phase of her grandson.

"Grandmamma," the child cuddled close to her, "it is something between Brigitte and me. I can't tell you now, but when you come home to-night, yes."

"To-morrow morning, Pierre; you will be asleep when I come home to-night."

"Yes; to-morrow morning: but, please, Grandmamma, do go. I am sure it will take the two-and-a-half hours to get out in the country so far."

Again Betty laughed, kissed the earnest, flushed face and presently did set off. Pierre accompanied her to the corner of Sixth Avenue, and saw her in the car, waving his mittens joyously until the tinkling bells on the horses were no longer heard. He was a very young cavalier, but he had grown up his seven years amid the quaint, courtly surroundings and customs of provincial France. As the car bumped quite out of sight and sound he ran back to the house, was soon inside, and up in the garret, followed by the three pussy cats, of course.

Bridget Supple had let her little master in, and

"The Door Between"

she watched him fly up the stairs: she said not a word.

Shaddle had just told her that "the master was home sittin' in his library:" but Miss Supple, having prevented the building of the wall: shown the little boy where the key fitted; and told him what lay on the other side, dared no more: in fact, as she wondered if the little boy even recollected about the key at all; wondered if to-day he would strive to emulate that king of whom he had spoken, she trembled in her felt slippers and was more than usually morose with her butler.

Shaddle, for his part, sat in his pantry, cleaning the silver which served for both sides of the house: Bridget was helping him: neither one spoke; polishing away at trays, spoons, ladles, knives, tea pots, cream jugs and the like. But before long both heard footsteps coming down the stairs; heard the soft patter of the cats' tread on the marble hall; heard the little boy's admonition.

"Now, Messieurs Ole Bull, Paganini, Straduarius, it is for you to be quiet. No, no playing with the strings of my boots: it is that we go to unlock happiness and let him out. Hush—h—h—." The little boy crossed the wide hall; Bridget put the pantry door ajar just wide enough

A Christmas Honeymoon

to let one of her eyes peer out: she beheld him push aside the heavy curtain holding it with his feet; beheld him put the key in the keyhole and try to turn it.

The key was rusty: the lock was rigid with age and disuse: the little boy tugged and wrenched and pulled to no purpose. He had on the Army boots, and the Army cap was falling about his ears. Finally he took the key out and turned away with it to the dining-room; he poured some oil from the cruet to a saucer and dipped his key in it; and then, the cats following his every motion as cats will, for they are an animal possessed of intense curiosity, Pierre de la Quéreau returned to the mahogany door and the curtain slipped back into its place behind him. Bridget Supple could no longer see him, but she heard the lock give, the key grind in the hole, the mahogany door creak, as the little boy doubtless pushed it open with all his strength, Straduaris, Ole Bull and Paganini purring and sidling about him as he achieved at least the unlocking of the door to happiness.

"The Lord love us, Shad!" exclaimed Miss Supple, as she fell away from her coign of 'vantage, "but the little master has unlocked the door between!"



*The careful tread of two small feet, lost almost
in a pair of cavalry boots.*

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"The Door Between"

He had: his lore as to that King of France who loved to fit keys, had stood him in good stead: Pierre had recollected that his Majesty had dealt with just such a refractory key at Amiens, with salad oil from his royal breakfast table.

The mahogany door opened towards the little boy's side of the house: once opened there confronted him a shower of dust, and impenetrable darkness, and the heavy curtains, of course, on Van Zandt's side. He extended his hands: there was no discouragement or fear in his mind: he had yet to learn that anyone deceived or told lies: it was but to go on, and discover what he was looking for. Little Peter, then, with the direct, unflinching hand of childhood, pushed against this barrier, and found that it yielded; it was also a curtain of cloth; he beat it back, his energies concentrated on the moment, which he believed had arrived, when he would find "happiness."

CHAPTER XIII

LITTLE PETER'S MISTAKE

MR. VAN ZANDT had come uptown early that afternoon: just before Christmas there was not much law business to be attended to. He had gone, as usual, into the library to read his *Evening Post*. He sat beside the fireplace where the Liverpool coal burned cheerily, opposite to him the pier mirror, some of its silvery lining worn away, behind him the curtained arch. There were leather chairs and the leather lounge; book-cases on all four sides; the large table in the middle of the room had on it the violin-case, the *Godey's Lady's Book*, Betty's last note to him; and the carte-de-visite he had taken from under her pillow, now in a crimson velvet passepartout. By-and-by he laid down his paper, lighted a cigar and drew nearer to the fender: there was not a sound in the house; nor yet without for the snow-fall had been heavy, and it had begun again to come down: not a sound save the cricket that

Little Peter's Mistake

chirped on his hearth. He heard it and smiled as he called it a lonely man's comrade: there had always been a cricket singing on that hearth in winter time, as long as he could remember. Presently, sleighbells jingled in the street; the hearty laughter of youth reached his ears; a voice called out to the horses "whoa there, steady!" and then silence once more. His eyes traveled to the table to the carte-de-visite in the velvet frame.

Betty would not use the new strawberry roans. Each morning the coachman waited for orders; each morning Shaddle or Bridget told him there were none.

But Betty had come home. He himself had seen her. Why had she come? There was but one wall between them: should he break it down and march in and repossess his own?

But how could he do that? Nothing might be farther from her desires than that he should show himself to her. She kept aloof: well, but a woman could not put out her hand to a man unless the man first extended his. Should he write to her? He took up his pen. Absurd! To write to Betty when merely a wall divided him from her.

But that wall! Who had built it? He, Peter

A Christmas Honeymoon

Van Zandt. What a fool he was! Of course Betty would not stir an inch toward the man who had built a wall up between her and him. He would have the wall torn down to-morrow. That was it; to-morrow. He got up and began pacing the floor restlessly, smoking all this while, so that by then the place was in a haze of filmy blue; through it the fire shadows flickering and playing on the andirons, the Indian rug, the impoverished mirror, his own face.

If he could but tear down that wall now, with his fists and fingers: they had had harder work to do, and had done it, over in the African mines: yes, he would do it now. Do it himself, here were the window bars, heavy, quite fit and able to batter plaster, mortar and bricks to a ruin. Then the image of her standing yonder under the bare trees in the park, expectant, eager, watchful for someone else, smote him to the heart, and he laughed a little, put down the tool he had seized, sat in his chair with his back entirely to the arch with its brocatelle curtains that had never once in all the years been displaced or touched by hand of his. He lighted a fresh cigar, and the smoke wreaths grew thicker and the mist over all things

Little Peter's Mistake

more dense: and the cricket sang on, and the rest of it was silence and his hunger for Betty.

There may have been, indeed there were, other sounds there: the creak of rusty hinges; the sweep of brocatelle; the careful tread of two little feet lost almost in a pair of cavalry boots that reached to a childish waist; the soft purring of three pussy cats and the swish of their tails against the Turkish ottomans near the arch. The little boy, by no means abashed or frightened, saw the figure of the man through the haze, but not his face, for that was not toward him: he made a further noise with his gigantic heels; but the man did not hear: his mind was with the woman he loved; he smoked on.

Then Pierre de la Quéréau made a more intentional sound with his boots. Still the man was oblivious. Finally the melodious voice of the child exclaimed: "Pardon, Monsieur, but are you happiness, or where is it, if you please?"

Then, to be sure, Peter Van Zandt started up from his dream-chair and turned to behold the tiny figure emerging from the cavalry boots, and the head roofed by the old army cap. This, to be sure, the little boy had lifted as he had spoken;

A Christmas Honeymoon

when he succeeded in handling it he saw the stranger against whom his grandmother had so carefully warned him.

"Monsieur!" cried the astounded child.

"Monsieur le Marquis!" exclaimed the equally astonished man: then certainly Mr. Van Zandt recovered himself; pleased in a sense, to think that his small acquaintance had come to call on him; admitted doubtless by Bridget or Shaddle, he had entered the room while the host had been unobservant, lost in thoughts of Betty. "I am glad to see you, sir," Van Zandt went on. "I did not hear the bell ring, nor your entrance: sit down," he wheeled a chair nearer the fire, which the three pussies evidently accepted as a note of welcome, for they began to bestow themselves in warm corners without further circumlocution.

But the little boy did not take the offered seat: he stood with his unwieldy cap in his hands and said: "No, I thank you, Monsieur; I did not know this would be your house. I thought it was our house," he glanced back intuitively toward the curtained arch.

Mr. Van Zandt, not exactly comprehending, smiled amusedly: so this little man was doubtless

Little Peter's Mistake

a visitor with his grandmother, at Betty's house, and by some whim of childhood he had come around by the area-way very likely, and walked in.

"And how is that, sir?" he nevertheless inquired.

"I did not come to visit you, Monsieur; not in the least. I ask your pardon. I came to find happiness and—" he looked around. "Please, Monsieur, tell me, is it really here?"

"No, sir," Van Zandt answered slowly, "it is not."

"But—" little Peter was about to say, "Brigitte told me it was here," when his instincts forbade the use of anyone's name as yet.

"But I am most happy to have you here," the host repeated.

"Monsieur, it is not that. Grandmamma," then he paused, searching all his inexperienced soul for the right road. "Grandmamma, Monsieur, is not happy, I am sure of it. And Bri—I mean someone told me that happiness was on the other side of the arch, and I promised to myself, Monsieur, to come through and find it, and have it for her when she gets home from Bloomingdale to-night, to-morrow." The little boy gave a deep

A Christmas Honeymoon

breath of relief at the conclusion of his long speech.

The man stared at him in open bewilderment; then a light dawned. Betty's visitors, of course, the little boy and his green brocade Grandmamma, and some fairy tale, all mixed up in his curly hair.

Well, children and fairy tales were alike the unknown quantity to Peter Van Zandt, but this charming little guest of Betty's! Ah, yes, perhaps, certainly, he could be led to talk of his hostess.

"I am glad you came," Van Zandt again repeated somewhat lamely. "Now, sit down."

"No, Monsieur, I thank you. It is not the visit. I could not. I promised Grandmamma never to visit the stranger. I will go back. Come," he said to the three pussies. "Strad, Ole Bull, Paganini, come home. Monsieur will excuse us all for entering; it was — a mistake," little Peter recalled his grandmother's word and used it, as he drew himself and his tremendous boots away from his host.

Van Zandt watched him as if spellbound as he retreated toward the brocatelle curtains: watched him arduously push them aside; beheld, through the haze the arch, open as of old; the dust of

Little Peter's Mistake

years; the mahogany door ajar; the glimpse beyond, of the staircase, the hat-rack, the newel-post of Mrs. Van Zandt's half of the double house. He saw the little boy urging his pussy cats and passing through, before he had collected himself.

CHAPTER XIV

PETER AND THE LITTLE MARQUIS MAKE A SECRET,
ALSO THE MARQUIS BEHOLDS THE CARTE DE VISITE

THEN Mr. Van Zandt sprang to the child, and the two, man and boy, stood together on the sill of the dividing door.

"Come back!" cried the man, his firm hold upon the small arm.

"But, Monsieur, I promised Grandmamma not to visit any stranger."

"I will write and explain to your Grandmother, sir: she is stopping in there, is she not?" he indicated Betty's side of the old house.

"Yes, Monsieur — of course, but —"

"You are looking for happiness, little boy, are you not?"

"Yes, Monsieur, to give to Grandmamma."

"Come back; maybe you can help me to find it and then I will give some of it to you."

"You will, Monsieur?"

"I will, upon my soul!"

Peter and the Little Marquis

"Then I will come." The three pussies had already returned to their warm corners, as Van Zandt, taking the army cap from his little guest, led him back into the library through the haze of the curling smoke. He glanced down as he laid the cap on the table: he saw his own initials inside, dimmed but still legible: he looked at the Goliath boots, and recognized these, too, as his own: he stared at the child.

"Now, sir, will you tell me how you came through there?" he looked over at the arch. "It will help us, Monsieur le Marquis, in our search for happiness."

"Monsieur, I play in the garret: it is there I find the boots and the cap: I find the keys on a peg as Ole Bull plays with the string.

"Yes?" Van Zandt assented eagerly; he remembered hanging them there very distinctly.

"Brigitte, Monsieur, it was Brigitte who is very excellent and true, tell to me that this large key was the one for this door, you see? She show to me the door behind the portières: and we make a plan to unlock the door: I to do it: because Brigitte, when I demand what is on the other side, she say she think happiness is: so I unlock: I come in: I find Monsieur."

A Christmas Honeymoon

Van Zandt was in the midst of a riddle.

The wall not built: and Brigitte, who was she? To be sure, Bridget: of course. But why should, or how could Bridget Supple presume to—pshaw!

The little boy, visiting Betty with his Grandmother, doubtless old friends of hers in France, was a charming little romancist. He had heard, he believed, somewhere, of just such fanciful children.

But the open arch?

The little boy meantime had been looking around, speculating according to his years, as to whence happiness might come, or in which article of furniture it might now be hidden. Then presently he caught sight of the carte-de-visite in the crimson velvet passe partout, and he cried out softly, "Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur, where then, did you get this?" The little boy fetched a big sigh and knelt down by the table, his two arms trying to fold themselves on top of the frame, his large eyes fixed on the tiny picture.

"Well, sir," Van Zandt replied, "I'm afraid I stole it." He was unadept at dealing with a child and mostly intent upon arranging mentally how to fetch his guest to speaking of Betty.

Peter and the Little Marquis

"Monsieur!" the little boy felt this to be untrue but before he could add anything to his exclamation of reproach, the man went on with,

"Why?"

"Because, Monsieur, this," he put a reverent little forefinger on the picture, "is Madame my Grandmamma."

"Are you not mistaken, sir?" the child shook his head.

"I have the same on my candle-stand, Monsieur, by my bed."

"But, sir, the name of this lady is not the same as yours: see, it is written on the card." He took the picture from its frame and held it up.

"Monsieur, I cannot read the writing."

"It says, 'Betty Van Zandt,'" the man read.

"Yes, Monsieur," little Peter nodded slowly, "exactly: my mamma was so, and my papa was de la Quéréau; also my mamma too," he explained to the best of his limited ability.

Peter Van Zandt stared on: there were tense thoughts racking his brain: Betty married to another? How? Impossible!

Presently his breath came hard as he spoke. "Your Grandmamma, sir, would you tell me her name?"

A Christmas Honeymoon

"But, yes, Monsieur. Grandmamma's name is Betty Van Zandt."

Then the man's whole body shook and his hands trembled, and his lips; and his arms ached, and his soul was scathed; and he lifted the little boy up and stood him on the table, not letting him outside his hold; and he asked, "What is the name, do you know, of that grandfather of yours who would not like to have you and your Grandmamma go to Grace Church?"

"His name, Monsieur, I know well, is like mine Peter — we say Pierre — Van Zandt: I have the middle name."

And the arms of the man enfolded the little boy very tenderly, very carefully, very holily, and he pressed his cheek to the little boy's cheek, as he said, "We will, we must find happiness for your Grandmamma, sir: but I will tell you where it is."

"Where, Monsieur, where?"

Peter pointed to the other side of the curtains. "It's over yonder, sir, in your Grandmamma's part of the house."

"But, no, Monsieur, no. I am sure, because if it were Grandmamma would not sit always, I have seen it, with her looks this way."

Then for Peter Van Zandt the roof was lifted

Peter and the Little Marquis

and he felt upon his head zephyrs from heaven. Then he laughed and lifted the little boy from the table and said, "Pierre."

"Yes, Monsieur?"

"You know Christmas is coming: only three days off now?"

"Yes, Monsieur, that is so," he was stroking Paganini's ears. Paganini sat, by his own selection, on top of the old violin-case.

"And both your Grandmamma and I agree, you say, that it is a sad time of year?" The little boy nodded as he cuddled his pussy cat.

"But suppose we make it joyful, you and I: suppose we believe that happiness will be found by doing that; suppose we make a secret, just you and I, about Christmas: shall we? Will you?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I will; anything for the happiness for Grandmamma," he drew nearer to Peter. "How shall we make the secret, Monsieur?"

For a moment Van Zandt did not reply: he was as yet a bit in the mists; but things were making themselves plain to him; he found himself facing the singular proposition of that radiant rose of a woman he had watched in Washington Parade Ground, as the grandmother of a little boy of seven: it was not easy to adjust it, all at once: so

A Christmas Honeymoon

little Peter had to wait. There were a hundred questions Van Zandt would have liked to ask this little boy: it was also a dilemma for him whether to disclose his own identity to the child or not.

But, Peter, for all his ardor of thirst for Betty, was level-headed: whereas his impulse was to pick up the small boy and rush with him straight over to the other side of the house, and there await her homecoming, he at once saw that this could not be: that, in fact, after all, there must be, he would rather have it so, a second wooing of his wife.

So for these reasons little Peter had to wait. At last Van Zandt said, "Pierre, what do you say to a Christmas tree in your Grandmother's drawing-room? A surprise — you know, you must not tell."

"Yes, Monsieur! 'A' Christmas tree! Oh, that will be beautiful!"

"I will go shopping and get all sorts of things that I think your Grandmamma would like, eh?"

"Yes, Monsieur," the child's eyes widened; the magnitude of all this robbed him of any lengthy speech.

"It can be done without letting your Grandmamma know, can it not?"

Peter and the Little Marquis

This brought little Peter to his language. "Ah, Monsieur; I don't know. It is for me always to tell Grandmamma everything and — you see! Now I must go home." He became suddenly terrified with his own position.

"Pierre, look at me."

"Yes, Monsieur, I look."

"I promise you to make it all right with Madame your Grandmamma, on the word of a gentleman, how is that?"

"Monsieur!" the gallant little boy's intonation was perfect, but it was painfully evident that he had reservations.

Van Zandt felt this. He said, "Well, sir, what is the trouble, won't you tell me?"

"Monsieur," the little boy answered deprecatingly, seeming to sink farther down in his huge boots, "if you please, I do not know who you are, the name of you, Monsieur."

Van Zandt felt the thrust: acknowledged its justice. He had wanted to hold his name, but could he now? Impossible.

"My name, Monsieur le Marquis, is Peter Van Zandt."

The little boy gave a sigh of relief: "Mon-

A Christmas Honeymoon

sieur, then it is the same name as my Grandpapa, one of them?"

"The same."

"The Grandpapa for which we pray, Grandmamma and I, every night, on our knees."

"Do you?" The man's features quivered.

"But, yes, Monsieur, and Grandmamma also cries a little, very often at this prayer. I don't love that Grandpapa!" His red lips tightened.

"Don't you? Well, never mind about him just now. To-morrow morning I will meet you when you go to Signor Prati's and we will plan the rest."

"Monsieur, is it this that will make the secret?"

"Yes. The secret is the Christmas tree: remember."

"Yes, Monsieur. I salute you, Monsieur. I go —" The little boy once more collected his pussy cats and, through the smoky atmosphere, the army boots much impeding, the army cap over his ears, Peter watched him pass back whence he came; heard the knob turn, heard the cats mew; presently heard the cricket sing.

Then he took up the *carte de visite* and pressed

Peter and the Little Marquis

it to his heart, then he crossed over and was glad to find that the little boy had forgotten to turn or to fetch off the key.

CHAPTER XV

TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

LITTLE Peter was awake very early the next morning. For the first time in his whole seven years he had "something on his mind" as older folks phrase it, something weighing where not even a feather had ever weighed before: his promise to his grandmother to tell her what the "something" between Bridget and himself was, when she should be home from her dinner at the Ogden's.

Betty recollected Pierre's promise very well, but it was no part of her simple scheme of education to remind her boy of that which he should not forget; a promise. She was pulling on her cuffs preparatory to going shopping. Straduarus was playing with her muff-cord; little Peter was putting on her overshoes: he was also puzzling out his own tangled skeins: finally, with a great last pull at the second overshoe, he said, "Grandmamma!"

Two Days Before Christmas

"Yes, dear?"

"That between Brigitte and me, I cannot tell to you to-day."

"Very well, dear," in Betty's mind it was undoubtedly a Christmas gift which Miss Supple had led the path to buying. "Be sure not to go off the block with your sled, after you come from Signor Prati's."

"I will, Grandmamma."

"Kiss me, darling." Betty kissed him: she was down the stairs; little Peter lingered at the landing; then he dashed impetuously after her.

"Grandmamma!"

"Yes?"

"I made the visit to the stranger!"

"Pierre!" Betty stood still, letting go of the doorknob.

"Madame Grandmère, it was wicked, but so very pleasant; oh, yes. I did it."

"But, Pierre, dear, you promised?" she sat down on the hall chair and drew him to her.

He nodded: "I did, but I did not know, how pleasant, how easy it was."

"It is generally easy to be naughty, dear. What, now, shall Grandmamma do with the little boy she cannot trust?"

A Christmas Honeymoon

"But you can trust: it was not the real visit," the little boy halted, "not the visit prepared. I did not know; it was as when Ole Bull jumps out of a dark corner, you don't know it until he does the jumps."

Betty's heart also jumped: where had the child been lured to?

"Pierre, what stranger's house have you been in, tell me?" Her tone was as severe as she knew of.

"Grandmamma, it is now that I know the name of him: he told me: he is exactly a gentleman, I am sure."

"Well, what is his name?"

"Peter Van Zandt, the same as the Grandpapa for which we pray."

Betty sat still, very still, and the rose flood died from her cheeks, and her fingers trembled as she tried to be nonchalant and button her gloves.

"Now it is that I have made the visit as Ole Bull jumps, you will not be angry or sorry with me, Grandmamma?"

She drew the little boy closer: "No dear, you have told me; that makes things right and —"

"But, Grandmamma, I have not told you all," he interrupted loyally. "That I cannot!"

Two Days Before Christmas

She scented the Christmas present and Miss Supple's injunctions, doubtless, not to reveal; so she laughed and answered, "No matter, by-and-by, perhaps at Christmas, eh, you will tell me all?"

"Exactly. Yes, Grandmamma, at Christmas," he pushed up her glove and pressed his lips to her wrist: "Good-by! good-by!" The roans and the coupé were at the curb, but Mrs. Van Zandt with a smile shook her head to the coachman, and walked over to Broadway.

Then a rush for cap and coat, mittens, sled and violin-case, Bridget and Shaddle both helping him, and off around the corner to see the stranger and to go to his lesson.

The butler and Miss Supple saw them meet from the window on the area.

"Maybe, come Christmas, Shad, the master and mistress'll — you know!" The faithful woman jerked her hand toward Mr. Van Zandt and the little boy.

"Maybe, come Christmas," remarked Mr. Shaddle in a wise but restrained tone, "other things'll come 'round too, Biddy."

When Van Zandt and the little boy met that

A Christmas Honeymoon

morning they plotted their secret without difficulty.

Van Zandt had seen Ned Davies: he already knew that Anny de Peyster had at last given in, and that after nearly thirty years of serving, the tireless Ned was to be rewarded: that on Christmas Eve at eight o'clock in the rectory of St. Michael's, Bloomingdale, Ned and Anny were to be married. Ned had confided to him in a curious matter-of-fact, curt fashion, that "no one was to be present except Anny's life-long best friend — Betty — and Anny's brother Nicholas.

So Peter knew that Betty would be away from the double house on Christmas Eve, up to a reasonably late hour at least: he did not, of course, know what the little boy had to tell him further; and this was that he was to go, after all, to the Ogden's party, having overcome his scruples as to Mr. Lawrence, and that Shaddle was to fetch him home at half-past-nine.

All this suited Mr. Van Zandt perfectly: he said so to the little boy.

"Yes, Monsieur," the child leaned thoughtfully against the railing. "Monsieur Van Zandt!" with sudden determination: conscience and duty worked strangely in this little lad's composition.

Two Days Before Christmas

"Yes, sir?"

"It is that I told Grandmamma; a little!"

"You did, sir? What did you tell her?"

"Oh, Monsieur not the secret we make, no. But the name of you, that was all."

"I see: and, Madame your Grandmamma said, what did she say, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"I don't recollect, Monsieur. I forget, but she did not complain."

"Nor forbid you to talk to me any more?"

"No, Monsieur!"

"That is good; now you get on the sled, and I will pull you as far as Signor Prati's."

"Oh, Monsieur! Would you? Oh!" the little boy was soon ensconced on the sled clasping the violin-case, and Van Zandt was pulling him rapidly along through the snow.

"Monsieur!" Pierre exclaimed after a silence as they were crossing Bleecker Street. "Are you sure about finding the happiness for Grandmamma?"

The man stopped short and answered, "Yes, I am sure."

The little boy sighed with contentment and confidence.

"Peter!"

A Christmas Honeymoon

"Yes, Monsieur?"

"When you come home from the party to-morrow evening, I think that happiness will very soon after come home also; and I will be waiting for you, sir, when you arrive."

"Where, Monsieur, will you be?"

"Very near to happiness, sir; and very near to that Christmas tree. Here we are at Number Twelve."

CHAPTER XVI

“AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM”

BETTY went up to Bloomingdale and Anny and Ned were married. Little Peter went to the party and beneath the smiles of Miss Polly Manierre, entirely forgot both his Grandmother and the Christmas tree. Pillows and keys, oats, peas, beans and barley grows; little Sally Waters; a Santa Claus with a bagfull of toys and comfits, all served to distract the little boy's thoughts.

But when word came in at half-after nine, that the butler had called for Master de la Quéreau, the whole of the secret rushed back into the little boy's brain, and all the way down in the omnibus from Fifty-second Street, his energies were taken up with wondering as to what and how it all would be when he reached home: that is, almost all the way, for by the time the stage was jolting over Fifth Avenue, in and out of the ruts and gullies of the big snow-fall, little Peter had fallen fast asleep in Shaddle's arms: nor did he waken when they

A Christmas Honeymoon

got out, nor while Shaddle carried him the two blocks, and up the stoop, and into the house, and laid him on the leather lounge in the dining-room.

"The Lord love him, let him sleep!" Bridget adjured as she slipped off his coat and cap and pulled his velvet suit straight, and smoothed his curls, covering him with an afghan. "Sure, it'll be better entirely for the two of them to meet alone by themselves!"

Shaddle nodded emphatically, as they both tiptoed out of the room, turning the gas down to a point and leaving the door on the crack. They went into the pantry and waited.

Peter Van Zandt waited, too.

He was in the drawing-room. He stood quite in the middle of the velvet carpet with the medallion of roses and the blue border. His eyes went over the blue and gold brocatelle sofas and chairs, the étagère with its burden of Bohemian glass, alabaster figures, Wedgewood plaques; the what-nots in the corners, the papier-maché tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the easel with the vivid Cropsey on it, and, in the space between the two marble columns dividing the long room, stood the finest Christmas tree that Jefferson market could afford.

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

Peter Van Zandt had been shopping indeed. There were toys for a little boy, of all sorts and kinds: bags full of Maillard's bon-bons; many parcels labelled for Bridget and Shaddle; the coachman, the charwoman, the washwoman, the chimney-sweeper, the postman, the lamp-lighter, the milkman, the choir boys of Grace Church, the newsman, the policeman, the dust man: Mr. Van Zandt had not forgotten anyone.

And there were boxes of silks and laces, and furs and jewels, for Betty Van Zandt. Books and flowers and an Indian shawl: rare carvings from the newly opened ports of Japan and China: all the prettiest things he could find: the whole tree decked out, too, with yards of tinsel fringes and balls, sparkling in the gleam of dozens of tiny candles in their metal sconces.

He had ordered the biggest logs to be piled on the hearth. Already the pussy cats had found this out and were basking in the blaze; nor had they been neglected by the Master; three splendid collars with huge bows of red ribbon hung on a branch marked "For Straduarius, Ole Bull and Paganini"; three fine painted saucers, too, for their milk.

A Christmas Honeymoon

For Van Zandt had taken the butler and Bridget somewhat into his confidence, perforce.

At twenty minutes past ten, he crossed the hall to glance at the sleeping lad, then he returned to the drawing-room, his watch in his hand.

She must be coming soon.

Far off sleigh-bells: nearer, nearer still; a full stop before the door: he recognized De Peyster's voice speaking, although he had not heard it in years. Shaddle had heard the cutter stop, too, and yet neither he nor Bridget moved in their pantry.

Peter Van Zandt himself stepped out and opened the front door, then retreated, unseen, to the drawing-room, closing that after him.

Betty must not be forced into a meeting. Betty must come herself: this was the masterful first thought which he stood on the medallion carpet, hugging to his starved soul.

Betty had gone. Betty must come back.

Betty entered the hall; she had shaken hands with Nick and exchanged all sorts of merry wishes with him in the vestibule, for his horse was restive and he dared not leave it out of sight. Nick had shut the door himself and the bells had set up their music as Betty stepped inside.

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

What confronted her?

The open arch: the curtains gone, the wall she had believed built up there, vanished. The vista clear, of the library on the other side.

Her heart beating to burst, she went over to the sill; she saw the mahogany door wide swung, a rusty key in its lock; she paused to look about her. No one was to be seen, nothing heard save the cricket on Peter's hearth.

She went into the room: yes, she did. On the table lay the violin-case, the *Godey's Lady's Book*, her own little last note to Peter, and an empty velvet passe partout.

Betty stood still and stared around at it all. The room was the forlorn, handsomely furnished, of course, but the forlorn, disappointed place of the lonely man.

Where was Peter?

Where was the wall?

How desolate it was! Just the cricket singing to himself on Christmas Eve.

Where was the little boy?

Where were Shaddle and Bridget?

Who had opened the front door for her?

Why was everything so still?

Her mink cape slipped from her shoulders.

A Christmas 'Honeymoon

She began to set the chairs more amiably; to pull the lounge around toward the fire; to straighten the books, and papers; to make the ornaments on the mantel more acquainted. She set the clock right — it was half an hour slow — she took up the little hair broom and brushed the hearth clean; put the andirons closer, and the poker and tongs and shovel upright; placed the droplight over the center of the table, and then, with a little sigh, half of complacency, half of poignant, unreasoning expectancy, Betty turned to go back whence she came.

Someone met her at the sill.

Someone who had said to himself, "She must come."

Instead, he had gone to find her.

He did not speak: he took her into his arms, to his heart, his kisses upon her lips; all the pent-up, long-restrained passion of a whole man throbbing in his veins, for her.

While they stood there looking into each other's eyes, in the silence that is more than any words in any language, the little boy had wakened from his nap, and, having got a glimpse of the tree, came running to look for his people.

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

"Grandmamma!" he called, halting at the foot of the stairs, "have you come home?"

"Yes," Peter Van Zandt answered for her.

"Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur!" Little Peter heard the voice of his friend but did not as yet see him; and now he whispered as he peered around toward the drawing-room, of course, where the tree stood.

"Where are you? and is it that you have found the happiness, Monsieur, as you promised, and can I give it to Grandmamma to-night?"

Then the little boy espied them and ran up to them, and Peter Van Zandt said, "Yes, I have found happiness and given it, I think, to your Grandmamma. Ask her."

And Betty said, "Yes, it is so."

And the little boy clapped his hands for joy as he exclaimed, "Oh, Grandmamma! Now you see that the stranger is quite entirely a gentleman, as I said!" but his childish eyes were a little toward the place of the Christmas tree.

"Pierre," Betty said gravely.

"Yes, Madame Grandmère?" as gravely.

"This is your Grandpapa, dear, the one we pray for every night."

A Christmas Honeymoon

The little boy put out his hand very seriously to the man. "I am glad, Monsieur Grandpapa. I will tell Brigitte it was the key to happiness, and now"—he cast wide eyes across the hall—"it is the Christmas tree! I expect, yes?" His other hand went to Betty's, and he led them over to the drawing-room, one on either side, and they all beheld the glory of the tree and the glory of the joy of a little child, for remembrance of the God-child who once came down to earth.

Presently Peter Van Zandt asked:

"Pierre, can you fetch me my violin from that other room?"

"I can, Monsieur Grandpapa." The little boy ran and brought it over.

"The fire is low," Peter Van Zandt said as he took the violin from its case; then he laid it on the logs, and it crackled and burned into a fierce blaze, and the strings moaned, perhaps with sorrow, up into the chimney; and the rosin on the bow spurted blue, and the sparks flew upon the pussy cats' fur and made them mew in a melancholy, resentful fashion, as if for one of their own kin.

Peter said to his wife: "It has never been out of its case since the day you went away."



"It is the Christmas tree now I expect, yes?"

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"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

And as her hand crept into his, as the little boy went to fetch Shaddle and Bridget, the voices made for the holy Eve, the Holiest Eve the world has ever seen, the voices of children, boy-children from the choir of the church they had been married in, began to sing outside in the garden, the wonderful anthem of the Blessed Child.

"Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

And little Peter said softly, "Is it not that we shall kneel down, Monsieur Grandpère?"

And they all knelt down together until the anthem was finished.

Then the little boy got up and began to dance and hop, and the gifts were given; and as Bridget at last carried the little boy upstairs to his bed, he whispered to her:

"But, Brigitte, it was indeed the key to happiness, yes."

When he was safely in bed, covered up with his down quilt, Miss Supple went down the back stairs to her kitchen, finding Shaddle there waiting for her.

A Christmas Honeymoon

"Shad," said Miss Supple somewhat hesitatingly, as she smoothed out her apron, "I'm after thinkin' that maybe them banns —"

"Biddy," replied Shaddle, "them banns has been read for us three times. Father O'Shaughnessy and meself fixed it up between us to do it at High Mass each time, where yourself could not be, and we'll be married to-morrow, Christmas Day in the morning."

In the drawing-room, standing together on the medallion carpet he had bought to furnish the bride's homecoming with, were Peter Van Zandt and his wife.

In the silence of the night, in the deeper silence of the earliest morning, no sound but the tick of the old clock on the stairs. He put his arm around her and lead her to the window that looked toward the east. They saw a star shining above them, brighter than all the other stars of heaven; and its light seemed to him to shine upon her: to her as if it shone upon him.

And near the star shone the moon, a slip of silver.

He glanced up at it, then down at her.

"Our moon," she whispered shyly.

"Our honeymoon. It's going to be a Christmas

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"

honeymoon, Betty, ours is — we'll start away together alone, my dear one, on Christmas day."

Then he took the carte de visite from his pocket and showed it to her.

"Your child, our child. Ah, Betty, Betty, my wife, my love, my all, at last!"

And Betty, between smiles and tears and with all the memories of all the years hovering in her soul, had only heart of grace to lay her head upon her husband's shoulder and say: "Merrie Christmas, dearest man of my heart. I'll go on the Christmas honeymoon whenever you say."

THE END

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